

Pigeon English



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN KELMAN

Stephen Kelman grew up on the Marsh Farm council estate in Luton, a town in Bedfordshire near London. As a child, he lived in a multiethnic community much like Harri's and witnessed the effects of poverty, crime, and violence firsthand. However, he notes that although violence was a problem, gang activity (and particularly knife crime) was not as significant an issue during his childhood as it is now. Kelman wanted to be a writer from the age of six or seven, but he studied marketing at the University of Bedfordshire and worked as a warehouse operative, care worker, and in local administration. In 2005, he decided to commit himself to writing. His first novel, *Pigeon English*, was picked from a "slush pile" by his agent. The novel was published in 2011 and received a host of awards, including the Desmond Elliott Prize, the Galaxy National Book Award for a new writer, the Guardian First Book Award, the Writers' Guild Award for Fiction, and the Man Booker Prize. Kelman has since published a second novel, *Man on Fire*, in 2016.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Stephen Kelman has stated in interviews that he was partially inspired to write *Pigeon English* by the 2000 murder of Damilola Taylor, a ten-year-old boy who had recently immigrated to London from Lagos, Nigeria. Damilola was stabbed by two older boys and left to bleed to death in a stairwell in Peckham, a neighborhood in London that was known for its high crime rate. Taylor's murder brought the issue of rising knife crime to the attention of the British public. Knife crime continues to be a topical issue in the UK and particularly in London, with 40,000 knife-related offences recorded by police in 2017. Besides knife crime, *Pigeon English* also addresses issues related to immigration. In 2010, one year before *Pigeon English* was published, a coalition government led by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron began to implement a harsher immigration policy, particularly influenced by the notoriously anti-immigration Home Secretary Theresa May. In 2010, May instituted the "hostile environment" policy, nicknamed as such after she commented that she aimed to "create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants." Anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK culminated in the 2016 "Brexit" referendum, in which a majority of British voters elected to leave the European Union.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Pigeon English has been compared to Mark Haddon's [The](#)

[Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time](#) (2003), which is also based on the framework of the detective novel and recreates the unique voice of an adolescent boy (in this case, an autistic teenager). Like Harper Lee's [To Kill a Mockingbird](#) (1960), Emma Donoghue's [Room](#) (2010), and Khaled Hosseini's [The Kite Runner](#) (2004), *Pigeon English* is written for adults but told from a child's perspective (however, like some of these other books, *Pigeon English* is a crossover book, meaning that it has also been marketed and read as a young adult novel). In addition, like Zadie Smith's [White Teeth](#) (2000) and Monica Ali's [Brick Lane](#) (2003), *Pigeon English* depicts a multiethnic community navigating issues of pluralism and prejudice in the heart of London.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Pigeon English*
- **Where Written:** Marsh Farm Estate, Luton, UK
- **When Published:** 2011
- **Literary Period:** Twenty-first-century British Fiction
- **Genre:** Crossover Young Adult/Literary Fiction
- **Setting:** A fictional neighborhood in London, UK
- **Climax:** During the scuffle between Harri, Dean, and the Dell Farm Crew, when the picture of the dead boy falls onto the ground.
- **Antagonist:** The Dell Farm Crew, especially Killa; Miquita
- **Point of View:** Harri Opoku, with occasional interludes from the perspective of the pigeon

EXTRA CREDIT

Next step, the small screen. *Pigeon English* was sold to the BBC for a "high six-figure sum" and will be adapted into a television series.

Reading for all. As well as being included in school curricula, *Pigeon English* has been used to help encourage reading within prisons.



PLOT SUMMARY

Harri sees the dead boy's blood outside Chicken Joe's, and Jordan bets him to touch it. A **pigeon** walks past indifferently. Harri was "half friends" with the dead boy, who was older and went to a different school. Harri lives on the ninth floor of Copenhagen House, one of three fourteen-story tower blocks. Harri talks to Papa on the phone and tells him that a pigeon flew into their house. His older sister Lydia was terrified, but

Harri caught the pigeon and released it from the balcony. Harri's baby sister, Agnes, lives with Papa and Grandma Ama back in Ghana, while Harri and Lydia live with their Mamma in London. Harri explains that soon the family will be reunited again. He tells the reader that, back in Ghana, he once saw the body of a boy who had been killed.

At school one day, a boy called X-Fire demonstrates what it's like to shank someone, using Harri as an example. There is a blonde girl in Harri's class called Poppy Morgan who makes his "belly turn over" when she smiles at him. Later, when Harri comes home from school, there are cops outside of his tower block. The cops question him and his friends about the dead boy. That night, while standing on his balcony, Harri sees a man below pulling a knife out from under the bin. Harri thinks that this man might be the murderer, but the helicopter circling overhead doesn't see the potential suspect.

Lydia's friend Miquita comes over and claims that it was the dead boy's own fault for getting killed because he shouldn't have been "fronting." Harri tells her that she doesn't know what she's talking about. Later, Harri asks his friend Dean if he thinks Miquita is right.

Harri attends the dead boy's funeral. After, he and Dean watch the crowd, checking for suspicious activity. Harri explains that X-Fire is the leader of the Dell Farm Crew. X-Fire pressures Harri into joining the crew, telling Harri that if he sets off the fire alarm at school he can join. Harri tries to set off the alarm but doesn't manage to break the glass. He runs and hides, fearing that the Dell Farm Crew are now his enemies.

Harri and Dean now consider themselves "proper detectives" on a mission to find out who killed the dead boy. Harri also befriends a Somali boy named Altaf, even though he's "not supposed to talk to Somalis because they're pirates." Harri and Dean interview "suspects" at the pub. Later, Harri sees Lydia pour bleach all over something inside the washing machine at the laundromat. Harri realizes that inside the machine are boy's clothes that are red like blood. Dean and Harri use sellotape to check for **fingerprints** around the scene of the crime.

Auntie Sonia later tells Harri that she burns off her fingerprints to avoid getting caught by the police and deported. She is a cleaner who has traveled all over the world, including to America. At school during afternoon registration, Poppy gives Harri a note asking if he likes her. He plans to give the note back to her after the Easter holiday, hoping his answer is the right one.

In May, there is a carnival in Harri's neighborhood. On Sunday, church is cancelled because someone smashed the windows and wrote DFC all over the wall. Harri argues with Lydia about the clothes she bleached. Harri insists he saw blood on them, but Lydia tells him that it was Miquita's blood—"girl's blood."

X-Fire, Dizzy, Killa plan to rob someone and force Harri to help. Harri is horrified to realize that the chosen target is Mr.

Frimpong, the eldest member of his church congregation. While the other boys push Mr. Frimpong over and stamp on his groceries, X-Fire searches the old man's pockets for his wallet and threatens to stab him if he doesn't give it up. Horrified, Harri runs away. X-Fire later warns Harri not to tell anyone about what happened. In church on Sunday, Mr. Frimpong reveals his infected knee and laments that in England no one ever helps strangers on the street.

Dean and Harri try to train Terry Takeaway's dog, Asbo, to recognize evil in order to help them find the killer. Asbo attacks Killa, which makes Harri think their training has worked. Jordan encourages Harri to get a knife, claiming that "everyone needs one." Poppy is now Harri's girlfriend. Harri collects the fingerprints of innocent people so he can compare them to those of the suspects. He then attempts to freeze off his own fingertips by holding them in the freezer.

One day, while Miquita is straightening Lydia's hair, she burns Lydia's cheek on purpose, asking, "Are you with us or against us?" Lydia assures her she is with them. After school, X-Fire and Dizzy chase Harri and threaten to kill him, but they eventually walk away.

Chanelle and Miquita get into a fight at school one day. Right as Miquita is about to push Chanelle through the window, teachers come over and break up the fight. Harri notices that Killa displays several "signs of guilt," and Harri begins to believe that Killa murdered the dead boy with Miquita. Harri and Dean grab Killa's hands and take his fingerprints with sellotape.

Agnes has a fever, and Harri worries that she is going to die. When her fever goes away, Mamma and Lydia both cry with happiness. Auntie Sonia and her abusive boyfriend Julius buy presents for Lydia and Harri. As a birthday surprise for his sister, Harri takes Lydia to some wet cement, where they both leave footprints and write their names. While Dean and Harri are playing football, Dean finds a wallet, inside of which is a photo of the dead boy smiling with a white girl. The boys discover that the photo has blood on it.

While at Lydia's house, Miquita tells Harri that she's going to teach him how to kiss. However, when Miquita forces Harri's hand inside her vagina, Harri pushes her away. Miquita and Lydia get into an argument, during which Lydia implies that Killa is a murderer.

Someone has scratched the word DEAD onto Harri's family's front door. Later, the Dell Farm Crew approach Harri and Dean and try to rob them. Harri is carrying the wallet with the dead boy's picture inside, and when the Dell Farm Crew grabs the wallet, the picture drops to the floor. Killa is visibly upset, and X-Fire burns the picture with a lighter. Just as X-Fire reaches for his knife and is about to pounce on Dean and Harri, Lydia shouts, and the three of them escape to the library together. Lydia explains that she filmed the whole scene, including X-Fire burning the picture.

Someone sets the local playground on fire, but firemen arrive and put the fire out. On the last day of school, Harri watches with delight as the Year 11 kids celebrate their newfound freedom. He and Poppy hold hands, and she kisses him. Harri runs home, shouting his love for Poppy, the pigeons, and the trees. When Harri is almost home, a boy jumps out and stabs him.

As Harri lies on the ground clutching his stab wound, a pigeon comes toward him and says that Harri will be “going home soon.” The pigeon tells him not to be afraid. Harri tries to picture Agnes’ face but cannot, because “all babies look the same.”



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Harrison Opoku (Harri) – Harrison Opoku, nicknamed “Harri,” is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. He is eleven years old, in Year 7 at school, and has recently moved to London from Accra, Ghana. He is curious, good-natured, and innocent, although at times finds it difficult to maintain this innocence in the face of pervasive peer pressure, crime, and violence. Harri is notable for overlooking prejudice; he loves **pigeons** even though other characters think they are dirty, and he befriends Altaf, who is shunned by the other kids for being Somali. Harri experiences prejudice as a recent immigrant from Ghana, along with the anti-black racism of characters like Vilis. To deflect and combat such bullying, Harri considers X-Fire’s invitation to join the Dell Farm Crew. However, Harri knows that the DFC’s actions fundamentally oppose the Christian values he was raised with. Harri has an antagonistic relationship with his older sister Lydia, although it is also clear that they also love each other very much. He adores his baby sister Agnes and looks up to Papa. He cannot wait until the family is reunited in London. Harri has a crush on Poppy Morgan, and eventually they become boyfriend and girlfriend—a relationship that is filled with innocence and joy. Alongside his friend Dean, Harri investigates the dead boy’s murder. This eventually gets them into trouble with the Dell Farm Crew and (implicitly) leads Harri to being stabbed and killed at the end of the novel by an unknown attacker—likely Killa.

The Dead Boy – The dead boy, who is never named, was a boy a few years older than Harri who was stabbed to death outside Chicken Joe’s. The reader learns fairly little about the dead boy other than that he loved Chelsea Football Club and possibly had a white girlfriend, who appears in the picture that Dean and Harri find of him. The motivations behind the dead boy’s murder emerge over the course of the novel. At first, Harri thinks the dead boy was stabbed simply so someone could steal his Chicken Joe’s, but it eventually becomes clear that Killa stabbed him because he was “fronting” and disrespecting the

Dell Farm Crew.

X-Fire – X-Fire is a student at Harri’s school and the leader of the Dell Farm Crew. He is the leader because he has the best at basketball, has stolen the most things, and has stabbed the most people. At first X-Fire is kinder to Harri than the other members of the Dell Farm Crew, nicknaming him “Ghana” and telling him he’s “alright.” However, after Harri repeatedly fails to complete the dangerous and illegal “jobs” X-Fire sets for him, X-Fire becomes increasingly irritated and cruel to Harri. X-Fire also has a dog named Harvey, who scares Harri.

Killa – Killa is a member of the Dell Farm Crew and student at Harri’s school. He earned the nickname from having stabbed many people, and Harri spends much of the novel suspecting that Killa was the person who murdered the dead boy. Killa starts dating Miquita and treats her badly, burning her hands with a lighter. At the end of the novel, Killa freaks out when Harri and Dean collect his **fingerprints** and when he finds out that they have a picture of the dead boy. Although it is never specified in the text, it is reasonable to assume that Killa stabs Harri at the end of the novel as a form of revenge and to prevent Harri from telling the police that Killa is the murderer.

Lydia – Lydia is Harri’s older sister. Like Harri, she faces pressures to assimilate into London culture, grow up quickly, and demonstrate loyalty to the Dell Farm Crew. These pressures are particularly exerted by her friend Miquita and by X-Fire, who assigns Lydia the task of bleaching blood-stained clothes in the laundromat (which presumably belong to Killa).

Jordan – Jordan is one of Harri’s best friends. Like Harri, he lives in Copenhagen House. He is around Harri’s age and has been expelled from school. Jordan’s mom is white, and Jordan is mixed race. He boasts about his bad behavior, which includes calling an adult “the c— word,” stabbing people, and drinking vodka. Mamma forbids Harri from hanging out with Jordan because she believes Jordan is a bad influence, but Harri does so anyway.

Connor Green – Connor Green is a boy in Harri’s class who always tells lies, plays tricks, and makes vulgar jokes. At the end of the novel, he reveals that he witnessed Killa stabbing the dead boy. However, in a classic example of “the boy who cried wolf,” almost no one believes him because of his usually dishonest nature.

Miquita – Miquita is Killa’s girlfriend and a friend of Lydia and Chanelle. She is violent and fiercely loyal to the Dell Farm Crew, which leads her to burn Lydia with a hair straightener and fight Chanelle in the school cafeteria, almost killing her by pushing her through a window. Miquita claims that it was the dead boy’s fault he was killed because he was “fronting.” She behaves in a sexually aggressive manner with Harri, and after Harri agrees to let her teach him to kiss, she sexually assaults him by forcing his hand down her pants.

Auntie Sonia – Auntie Sonia is Harri’s aunt (presumably on

Mamma's side, although this is never explicitly specified). She is honest, kind, and generous, and gives Harri and Lydia gifts. She has travelled all over the world, including to America, and once made Will Smith's bed while working as a hotel maid. An undocumented immigrant, she burns off her **fingerprints** on the stove in order to avoid being detained by border police. She dates a rich, physically abusive man named Julius, who sells fake visas. Eventually she decides to leave the UK (and possibly return to Ghana) in order to escape from him.

Dean – Dean is Harri's best friend from school. Together, the two of them investigate the murder of the dead boy, inspired by Dean's love of the CSI television show. Dean is a redhead and is teased about this by the other kids at school. However, Harri concludes that he "doesn't even care if [Dean] has orange hair. That's what makes him so brainy (a detective's best skill)."

Poppy Morgan – Poppy Morgan is a white girl at Harri's school whom Harri has a crush on. Harri loves Poppy's blonde hair and, after they start dating, calls her "my yellow." Poppy is kind to Harri and kisses him for the first time on the last day of school, just before his death.

Chanelle – Chanelle is a friend of Lydia and Miquita. She and Miquita get into a violent fight in school, and it is implied that this is because Chanelle threatened to tell someone that Killa stabbed the dead boy. Miquita almost kills her by pushing her through a window, but the teachers intervene.

Fag Ash Lil – Fag Ash Lil is a woman who lives in Harri's tower block, Copenhagen House. Harri believes that she is the oldest person he's ever seen and estimates that she is about "200" years old. She earned her nickname because she picks up used cigarettes from the floor, and there is a rumor that she killed her husband and baked him into a pie.

Altaf – Altaf is a Somali boy also in Year 7 at Harri's school. He is very quiet and doesn't have many friends, in part due to prejudice against Somalis, whom the other kids claim are "pirates." Altaf is also teased about his lips, which are perceived as feminine, earning him the nickname "Gay Lips." Like Mamma, Altaf's mother does not want Altaf to learn about other religions in religious education, and Harri and Altaf strike up a friendship while they sit in the library during RE lessons. Altaf loves drawing superheroes, and Harri finds his knowledge about them impressive. Altaf reveals that his father died in a war.

Mr. Frimpong – Mr. Frimpong is an elderly member of Harri's church congregation, presumably also a Ghanaian immigrant. He is very religious and an enthusiastic singer of hymns. The Dell Farm Crew (and an unwilling Harri) rob him, which worries Harri because Mr. Frimpong is "only skinny" and frail. Not only do the boys take his wallet, they also stamp on his groceries and leave him lying helplessly on the ground.

Julius Julius is the rich man who dates Auntie Sonia. He frequently totes a baseball bat, which he calls "the Persuader,"

and physically abuses Auntie Sonia, who eventually flees the country to escape from him. At one point, Lydia reveals to Harri that Julius sells fake visas, which is why he's so wealthy. Given that Mamma frequently gives Julius money, the implication is that Harri's family's visa is also fake.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Papa – Papa is Harri's father. He still lives in Accra, where he owns a shop. Although he only appears in flashbacks and on the phone, it is clear that he is a kind and loving father and a positive role model for Harri.

Vilis – Vilis is a Latvian boy in Harri's school who is very racist and taunts Harri for being African. Vilis' incessant bullying is what makes Harri initially consider joining the Dell Farm Crew.

Agnes – Agnes is Harri's baby sister. She stays in Accra when Harri moves to London because Mamma works too much to be able to take care of her. Instead, Grandma Ama looks after her. Agnes develops a fever, which Harri worries is going to kill her, but she soon recovers.

Grandma Ama – Grandma Ama is Harri's grandmother. She takes care of Agnes in Ghana after Harri, Mamma, and Lydia move to London.

Mamma – Mamma is Harri's mother and Auntie Sonia's sister or sister-in-law. She is a midwife and works long shifts, often at night. She is very religious and fairly conservative.

Pastor Taylor – Pastor Taylor is the pastor of Harri's church in London.

Manik – Manik is one of Harri's friends from school. Manik used to be bullied but has been protected ever since Manik's papa stepped in and began walking him to and from school.

Manik's Papa – Manik's papa walks Harri and Manik to school and teaches Harri to tie his uniform tie on Harri's first day of school.

Dizzy – Dizzy is a member of the Dell Farm Crew and student at Harri's school.

Clipz – Clipz is a member of the Dell Farm Crew and student at Harri's school.

Terry Takeaway – Terry Takeaway is a local character who earns his nickname because he is constantly stealing. Despite this criminality and the fact that he is an alcoholic, he is a good-natured, comic character who Harri considers a friend. Terry has a dog named Asbo, whom Harri likes.

Mr. Tomlin – Mr. Tomlin is Harri's science teacher. Harri adores him because he is funny, charming, and intelligent.

Jordan's Mom – Jordan's mom is white and has a tattoo, which Harri thinks makes her a tutufo.

Grandpa Solomon – Grandpa Solomon is Harri's late grandfather. Harri imagines him playing rock, paper, scissors with Jesus in **heaven**.

Female Cop – The female cop is a policewoman who investigates the murder of the dead boy. Harri is shocked by the fact that she is a woman.

Kyle Barnes – Kyle Barnes is a kid in Harri’s school who teaches Harri the “dirty finger trick,” which means giving people the finger.

Brayden Campbell – Brayden Campbell is a student at Harri’s school.

Nathan Boyd – Nathan Boyd is known as the bravest kid in Year 7 because he always accepts dares, even once accepting a dare to lick a “crack spoon.”

Abena – Abena was Lydia’s best friend back in Ghana. Harri admits that he was in love with Abena for “one day,” but that he stopped loving her because she was “very stupid.” Abena wanted to be obruni and attempted to whiten her skin using soap flakes.

Chicken Joe – Chicken Joe is the owner of the local chicken shop, which is named after him.

Kwadwo – Kwadwo was Harri’s barber back in Ghana.

Mario – Mario is Harri’s barber in London. Harri doesn’t like him because he is grumpy.

Daniel Bevan – Daniel Bevan is a student in Harri’s school who has asthma. He promises to donate his book collection to Harri if Daniel dies before Harri does.

Chair Car Lady – The chair car lady is a local disabled woman who rides a mobility scooter, which Harri calls a “chair car.” Harri claims that she requires the scooter because she is “too fat to walk.”

Jesus – Jesus is a local character who rollerblades around the neighborhood. He earned his nickname because of his long hair and beard.

Nish – Nish is a local Pakistani man who sells meat at the market. He is arrested by immigration police.

Nish’s Wife – Nish’s wife is also arrested and taken away by immigration police, along with her husband.

The Butcher – The local butcher in Harri’s neighborhood.

TERMS

Tro-tro – A tro-tro is a share taxi common in Ghana.

Dey touch – A Ghanaian term meaning crazy.

Obruni – Obruni is the Ghanaian term for foreigner and usually means that person is white. It comes from the Twi language.

Adjei – Adjei is a Ghanaian word used to express annoyance or dismay.

Asweh – Asweh is Ghanaian slang. It is a shortening of the

phrase “I swear,” and has the same meaning.

Dirty Blows – Dirty blows refers to being punched or beaten.

Hutious – A Ghanaian term meaning frightening.

Tutufo – Slang for prostitute.

Jinx – A game played in England wherein two people who say the same word at the same time are then forbidden from speaking.

Chook – A term from Nigerian pidgin, meaning stab.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



HOME AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

When the novel begins, Harri, Mamma, and Lydia have just moved to London from Ghana. As a result, Harri is still in the process of adjusting to life in the UK. This is reflected in his idiosyncratic use of English and his observations about British customs, some of which he finds very strange. Harri tries to settle into his new home, but this task is difficult for several reasons—chief among them is the fact that Papa, Agnes, and Grandma Ama remain back in Ghana. Harri has been promised that the family will soon be reunited in London, at which point London will truly become “home.” However, the tragedy of the story lies in the fact that Harri dies before this takes place, at which point the **pigeon** assures him that he is going “home.” Therefore, home is presented as somewhere that is continually deferred. Many of the characters long for home, but the novel suggests that home is more of a myth than a physical place.

Harri makes many observations about the contrast between life in London and life in Ghana. Some of this contrast is based on cultural differences. For example, Harri is puzzled by a sign in the playground that says, “Say No to Strangers,” and this bewilderment is echoed by Mr. Frimpong, who—after he is knocked to the ground by the Dell Farm Crew—is dismayed that in England, strangers do not look out for one another as they do in Ghana. The implication is that part of what makes somewhere “home” is how strangers relate to each other, so it is hard to feel at home in a place like London where strangers treat each other with suspicion and apathy.

Other differences between Harri’s lives in London and Ghana are rooted in socioeconomic issues. There is poorer infrastructure in Ghana, and Harri recalls having to deal with electricity blackouts. At the same time, Harri’s family was, in

relative terms, wealthier in Ghana than they are in the UK. Harri expresses his sadness at the fact that, in London, Mamma has to work at night as well as during the day. This is the reason that baby Agnes cannot live with them, and it therefore exacerbates the feeling that Harri and his family are not yet at home in England. The novel thus emphasizes the challenges that come with the immigrant experience. Not only are immigrants removed from home and familiarity, but they have to face additional social and economic challenges—including the pressure to assimilate—which can leave them feeling even more isolated and without a home.

The novel also explores the limitations placed on travel and migration by government authorities, further complicated the concept of home. At one point, Nish and his wife—who are from Pakistan—are arrested by police in order to be deported. Meanwhile, Auntie Sonia burns off her **fingerprints** so that she can keep travelling around the world and avoid being detained by border authorities. Harri explains, “If you have no fingerprints [...] they don’t know where you belong so they can’t send you back.” This explanation complicates ideas about home and migration by suggesting it is possible to not “belong” anywhere. Harri also notes that being black makes it especially difficult to travel and migrate, as “some of the countries won’t let you in if you’re black.” These stories emphasize that racism and xenophobia mean that people have unequal access to home and the feeling of belonging. “Home” is not a neutral concept, but a politically-charged one.

Harri and his family are very religious, and this lends itself to a spiritual understanding of home. Throughout the novel, Harri is constantly thinking about **heaven** and wondering what it is like. Of course, for Christians like Harri and his family, heaven is the ultimate meaning of home—far more so than any place on Earth. Harri’s preoccupation with heaven can arguably be explained by the fact that he has recently experienced so much change and instability surrounding his conception of “home” on Earth. For Harri, there is comfort in knowing that heaven is an unchangeable, safe home.

When Harri is stabbed at the end of the novel, the pigeon tells him, “You’ll be going home soon,” adding, “You’ve been called home.” Harri seems to assume that the pigeon is referring to heaven, which leads Harri to ask if the pigeon works for God. The pigeon refuses to answer, leaving it ambiguous as to whether Harri is going to heaven (home in the Christian sense) or whether “home” refers to something else. In either case, the novel ends on a bittersweet note. Harri may be “going home,” but in death he is leaving behind his homes in the mortal world: London, Ghana, and his family. Ultimately, the novel suggests that because people on Earth are displaced from their homes and made to feel unwelcome in new homes, perhaps “home” is a concept that does not truly exist in the mortal realm.



INNOCENCE VS. GUILT

The novel begins with the death of an unnamed character known only as “the dead boy.” Harri becomes obsessed with finding the boy’s killer, and he teams up with Dean on a “personal mission” to solve the case. This leads Harri to reflect on the nature of innocence versus guilt as he surveys his community for signs of the killer. At the same time, the novel’s exploration of innocence and guilt extends beyond issues of crime by exploring broader ideas about morality and maturity. Indeed, the novel is simultaneously a detective story and a coming-of-age story depicting the loss of childhood innocence.

The dead boy is portrayed as a picture of innocence. Harri recalls the boy defending him from bullies, and the boy is buried with the Chelsea Football Club badge on his coffin, emphasizing both the dead boy’s kind nature and his youth. Later in the novel, after Miquita suggests that it was the dead boy’s fault that he was killed because he was “fronting,” Harri insists that this is wrong, though his youth and naïveté mean he does not yet have a sophisticated understanding of innocence and guilt. While Miquita claims to understand the situation better because she is older, it is the young, innocent Harri who is able to instinctively know the truth of the matter. However, Harri’s youth makes it difficult for him to be confident about his own instincts, and thus he remains in a state of confusion.

Harri’s somewhat naïve view of innocence and guilt is further emphasized by the list of “Signs of Guilt” he develops with his friend Dean, which includes “talking too fast” and “sudden bouts of violence,” as well as “ants in your pant,” “spitting,” and “uncontrolled gas (farting a lot).” This list illustrates that Harri’s understanding of criminal guilt (and the world in general) is childish and limited. At the same time, by using this list along with his other “detective” skills, Harri is able to identify Killa as the murderer, which the novel strongly implies is the correct conclusion. This suggests that, although Harri may be naïve and somewhat misguided in his beliefs, his instincts lead him to draw correct conclusions about innocence and guilt.

One of the reasons why Harri struggles to identify the killer is because he doesn’t have a wealth of clear examples of innocence. Even though he is only eleven, Harri has seen the bodies and blood of two dead boys, is sexually assaulted by Miquita, and is encouraged to participate in criminal activity by the Dell Farm Crew. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Harri does not want to lose his innocence—particularly not at such an alarming rate. He runs away while helping the Dell Farm Crew rob Mr. Frimpong, showing that he still has a childlike innocence and aversion to harming others. Similarly, he would much rather hold hands with Poppy than engage in sexual activity with her or with Miquita. Throughout the novel, Harri tries in vain to hold onto his innocence while those around him coerce him into growing up too fast.

In the end, Harri's refusal to participate in violence in an attempt to hold onto his own innocence is what catalyzes his death. This ending suggests that, while a powerful force, innocence cannot hold out against the forces of violence, cruelty, and corruption. Harri attempts to remain innocent in a difficult, cruel world, and—while this effort is admirable—his attempt ultimately fails.



LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND NORMS

The title *Pigeon English* immediately emphasizes that the novel is concerned with questions of linguistic and cultural hybridity. The word “pidgin” refers to a hybrid language developed so people who speak different languages can communicate with one another—usually in a colonial context. Pidgin English, therefore, refers to languages that hybridize English with another language. The title of this book, *Pigeon English*, is a play on words, echoing Harri's idiosyncratic use of language, as he mixes British English with Ghanaian slang and Pidgin English (and, of course, the title also gestures to Harri's love of pigeons). Harri makes an effort to assimilate into London culture by studying and imitating the ways in which English is spoken in London. However, considering that London, its customs, and its slang are constituted by different multiethnic factions, Harri *adds* to the culture rather than assimilating into it.

Harri's narration is peppered with words and phrases like “Advise yourself,” “Adjei,” “Dey touch,” “Bo styles,” “Ease yourself,” and “Hutious.” If the reader doesn't understand these words at first, they likely will by the end of the novel due to seeing these words repeated and picking up on the context in which they are used. The reader's learning curve mirrors Harri's own adjustment to the language, signs, and norms of London culture. Although Harri partially learns about life in the UK through school—in classes such as English and citizenship—he mainly learns simply from observing and copying the world around him.

This type of experiential learning inherently involves a process of trial and error, which can prove challenging and even dangerous, as Harri is sometimes punished for misunderstanding the customs and expectations that exist in London. For example, when the Dell Farm Crew say they have a “job” for Harri, he says that he doesn't need a job, not realizing that X-Fire is assigning him a task as a trial for whether Harri can join their group. Although X-Fire forgives Harri's ignorance in that instance, Harri is later punished for not showing enough respect and deference to the Dell Farm Crew. For young, vulnerable immigrants like Harri, assimilating into a given culture and understanding its language, customs, and social norms, is not just a courtesy, but can—under certain circumstances—be a matter of life and death.

Signs serve as a tool for “reading” the norms of a certain culture

in a similar way to language. It is therefore unsurprising that Harri is intrigued by the signs that exist around London, such as the sign on the doors of the shopping center that reads, “NO ALCOHOL... NO BICYCLES... NO DOGS... NO SMOKING... NO SKATEBOARDS... NO BALL GAMES.” Harri notes that underneath this, someone has written “NO FUGLIES.” This shows that language is created both through “official” methods, such as the instruction of English in schools and the dictionary, as well as unofficial processes, such as the development of slang. Similarly, the defaced sign shows that rules, expectations, and norms are established by authority figures (governments and business owners), as well as ordinary people. It also highlights that even as signs proclaim to explicitly lay out the rules of a given culture, the reality is much more complex. It is not always possible to read signs in a straightforward way, and background context is often required to understand their meaning.

By presenting the difficulties Harri faces in coming to grips with the language, culture, and norms in London, the novel challenges the assumption that immigrants can and should simply “assimilate” into a given culture. Instead, *Pigeon English* suggests that the immigrant experience involves contributing to the language, culture, and norms of one's new home, thereby creating a new, hybrid culture. However, Harri also highlights that failing to understand and assimilate into certain norms can have extremely serious consequences, including violence and death.



PLURALISM VS. PREJUDICE

Harri lives in the midst of a highly multicultural community. Alongside people with English heritage, Harri encounters other Ghanaian immigrants, Somalis, Pakistanis, Latvians, and others. In some ways, his community represents the ideal of multicultural pluralism, meaning a state in which multiple different groups of people with different backgrounds and belief systems live harmoniously alongside one another. Although Harri is occasionally made to feel different as a recent immigrant—for example, when X-Fire insists on nicknaming him “Ghana”—his community features a significant proportion of immigrants, and his recent arrival to England is mostly treated as unexceptional. On the other hand, the novel also suggests that just because a multicultural community appears to be coexisting harmoniously, in reality, this community might still be plagued by prejudice. Just because a community is multiethnic, doesn't mean that its residents are open-minded and tolerant. Indeed, the novel indicates that it is necessary to possess an open-minded, loving attitude like Harri's in order to avoid prejudice and live in harmony.

Racial and cultural prejudice informs the social world at Harri's school. For example, Harri is bullied by a Latvian boy called Vilis, who tells him that in Latvia, “they burn black people into

tar and make roads out of them.” Elsewhere in the novel, Harri explains that “you’re not supposed to talk to Somalis because they’re pirates.” These interactions show that prejudice is not unidirectional in the novel—it is not a simple case of people with racial privilege bullying those who are deemed inferior. Instead, it seems as if everyone in the novel holds prejudiced opinions about everyone else. The fact that Harri holds prejudiced opinions even though he is mainly a kind, loving, and open-minded person suggests that the power of prejudice often overcomes people’s (and especially children’s) innocent tolerance.

At the same time, Harri stands out as being more willing than others to overlook prejudice and accept people despite their differences. For example, he ends up dismissing the stereotype about Somalis being pirates and befriends a Somali boy named Altaf. Ironically, Harri and Altaf meet because both their mothers reject religious pluralism and request that their sons skip their religious education class so they don’t have to learn about other religions. Harri and Altaf’s friendship is thus an example of children being able to overcome the prejudiced instilled by both society at large and their own parents. Likewise, Harri’s friend Dean and girlfriend, Poppy, are both white, and Harri also remains friends with Jordan despite Mamma insisting that Jordan is a “waste of time.” Harri’s open-mindedness toward other people adds an element of optimism to the book, suggesting that it is possible for younger generations to refuse to inherit their parents’ prejudice.

The novel paints Harri’s multicultural community as being plagued by prejudice, and while there is hope in Harri’s kindhearted, innocent willingness to accept those who are different from him, the cycle of prejudice is difficult to break. Experiencing prejudice can make people more likely to espouse similarly biased views as a defense mechanism—for example, when Harri attempts to deflect Vilis’ bullying by calling him “potato house.” However, in order for prejudice to truly give way to harmonious pluralism, it is necessary for all people to adopt Harri’s childlike, loving attitude toward others.



MASCULINITY, VIOLENCE, AND DEATH

Pigeon English is a coming-of-age novel, but it also specifically deals with the challenges of being a boy—and particularly a young black boy living in a

tough, violent community. Although Harri does not have a personal inclination toward violence, throughout the novel he faces pressure from the Dell Farm Crew to prove himself as a man by harming others. To X-Fire and his gang, inflicting violence is a cool, boast-worthy pursuit. This is made clear from the beginning of the novel when X-Fire brags about what it is like to “chook” (stab) someone. In the context of this community, being a man becomes synonymous with inflicting violence. Thus, even as Harri tries to avoid violence and death, his status as an adolescent boy traps him in a cycle of violence

that ultimately leads to his own death.

Throughout the novel, the Dell Farm Crew seems to commit violence for no reason. They violently rob other children, even when they know that these children don’t have anything of value—when they rob Dean, for example, they only find sixty-three pence in his pockets. They smash the windows of Harri’s family’s church and smear a Snickers bar on the walls, trying to make it look like human feces. The Dell Farm Crew even robs the elderly Mr. Frimpong and stomp on his groceries as he struggles to get up. All of these acts demonstrate that the Dell Farm Crew embraces violence for its own sake. At the same time, the pressure that the Dell Farm Crew puts on Harri also shows that they participate in violence as a way of continually proving their own masculinity and avoiding seeming weak. In the tough world in which they live, appearing weak can mean—as it does in Harri’s case—being killed.

It is important to note that it is not just male characters who commit violence in the novel. At school, Miquita and Chanelle get into a fight, and before the teachers arrive to break it up, it seems as if Miquita intends to kill Chanelle by pushing her through a window. Later, Harri observes that, as Killa’s girlfriend, Miquita was Killa’s “accomplice” in the dead boy’s murder. When Miquita burns Lydia’s face with a hair straightener in order to make her keep quiet about the murder, it echoes Killa’s habit of burning Miquita’s hands with a lighter. While girls participate in violence, it is clear that the culture of violence that the characters live in is created and perpetuated by the demands of masculinity. All of the characters are forced to uphold the masculine traits of toughness and ruthlessness in order to protect themselves.

This culture of violence means that life is treated as disposable and death is ever-present. It is significant that the novel begins and ends with the deaths of two young boys, as it evokes a cycle of violence and death. Although there is a degree of sadness surrounding the murder of the dead boy, several characters brush it off, like when Miquita suggests that the boy had it coming. Harri’s mission to find the dead boy’s killer indicates that he is refusing to view the boy’s life as disposable. In vowing to bring the boy’s killer to justice, Harri attempts to honor the boy’s life. Tragically, it is this mission that leads Harri to be stabbed and killed—a turn of events that proves how difficult it is to escape the cycle of violence and death.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



PIGEONS

As is indicated by the title, pigeons are the most important symbol in the novel, representing

freedom from oppression and prejudice. Part of the reason why pigeons are so significant is because of the parallels the novel establishes between pigeons and people, and especially immigrants like Harri. One of the connections between the two groups is the theme of flight, with a parallel drawn between the flight of pigeons and the migration of people. Harri loves to spread his wings in the windy area at the bottom of his tower block and pretend he is flying like a bird, which illustrates his desire for freedom. When Auntie Sonia has to leave in order to escape from Julius, Harri draws a pigeon on her cast, implicitly hoping to bestow the freedom of pigeons onto her. Harri adores pigeons, but that makes him unusual in the world of the novel. Other people, such as Mamma and Lydia, don't like them and want to keep them away using pigeon nets. This is partly due to the perception that pigeons are germ-ridden and dirty. As the racist character Vilis shows, some people claim that the same false stereotype is true of African immigrants. Harri's embrace of pigeons thus demonstrates his open-minded, loving nature and, in particular, his willingness to put aside prejudice. This care is reciprocated by Harri's "special pigeon," a mystical figure who serves as a kind of guardian angel to Harri. In a series of philosophical reflections, the pigeon imparts wisdom, and at several points rescues Harri from danger and teaches him to act with integrity. When Harri is stabbed at the end of the novel, the pigeon is the only character present and assures Harri that he will soon be going "home." The pigeon thus conveys that there is more to both people and pigeons than meets the eye, but that this truth can be obscured by prejudice.



FINGERPRINTS

In the novel, fingerprints symbolize the fear of exposing one's identity. This symbol is most closely associated with Auntie Sonia, who is an undocumented immigrant and burns off her fingerprints in order to avoid being detained by border control. Harri explains: "Your fingerprints tell them who you are. If you have no fingerprints, you can't be anybody. Then they don't know where you belong so they can't send you back." Although Auntie Sonia has never harmed anyone, she is treated as a criminal due to strict immigration laws. This compels her to engage in a major act of self-harm and to destroy her own identity simply in order to be able to travel and live in different countries. Fingerprints are also important in the context of Dean and Harri's mission to apprehend the dead boy's killer. Dean has learned about the significance of fingerprints in criminal investigations from watching the TV program CSI and decides to imitate the detectives he sees on TV and gather fingerprints himself. As he and Harri are only able to use sellotape to gather the fingerprints, it does not seem likely that they will be able to use these as real evidence. However, when the pair gather Killa's fingerprints, it makes him extremely flustered and later demands them "back," which helps convince Harri and Dean that he truly is the murderer.



HEAVEN

In *Pigeon English*, heaven symbolizes stability and safety. Harri and his family are very religious, and Harri spends much of the novel imagining what heaven is like. Harri is especially fixated on the question of whether change takes place in heaven, including whether babies grow up in to adults. In this sense, heaven represents a foil (direct contrast) to his life on Earth, which has been governed by extreme change ever since he moved to London. Not only does Harri have to adjust to an entirely new country, culture, and community, but he must deal with the dramatic events that take place within that community—mainly the murder of the dead boy. At the same time, Harri is also facing the internal changes of puberty and the transition from childhood to adolescence, along with the peer pressures that this entails. Because of all these changes, Harri finds comfort in the idea of heaven as a fixed, unchanging state, a "home" that does not exist in a particular geographic location. He imagines his late Grandpa Solomon playing rock, paper, scissors with Jesus, just as he used to do with Harri himself on Earth. At the same time, Harri is also disturbed by the idea that things do not change in heaven. He is relieved to learn that people who have lost limbs have their limbs grow back in heaven, and that babies who die grow up there. Harri admits: "I'd hate it if I had to stay a baby forever." This statement foreshadows Harri's death in the novel. Although the **pigeon** makes it clear that heaven is real and that Harri is going "home," the tragedy of children's deaths is that they do not get to grow up on Earth—even if, at least in Harri's mind, they do so in heaven.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bloomsbury edition of *Pigeon English* published in 2011.

March Quotes

☝ I live in Copenhagen House. My flat is on floor 9 out of 14. It's not even hutious. I can look from the window now and my belly doesn't even turn over.

I love going in the lift, it's brutal, especially when you're the only one in there. Then you could be a spirit or a spy. You even forget the pissy smell because you're going so fast.

It's proper windy at the bottom like a whirlpool. If you stand at the bottom where the tower meets the ground and put your arms out, you can pretend like you're a bird. You can feel the wind try to pick you up, it's nearly like flying.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

The novel begins at the site of the dead boy's murder. Jordan and Harri leave offerings for the boy and then run home. In this passage, Harri introduces the housing estate where he lives. Harri's excitement about living on the ninth floor and the joy he feels going in the elevator and pretending to be a bird highlight his youthful innocence and love of life. Large tower blocks like Harri's are often associated with poverty, neglect, crime, and violence, and Harri hints at this when he mentions the "pissy smell" in the elevator. However, Harri sees his tower block differently, and turns living there into an adventure. This is made possible by his highly active imagination, which allows him to pretend that he is a "spirit," "spy" or "bird."

Indeed, another important aspect of this passage is Harri's affinity for birds and desire to fly like one. Harri's relationship with birds conveys his desire for freedom. As a child, an immigrant, and a member of a low-income family, Harri's freedom is restricted in various ways. He can't, for example, go back to Ghana to see Papa, Agnes, and Grandma Ama, and must wait until they join him in London to see them again. On a smaller scale, his movement around his own neighborhood is restricted by the bullying and violence of other kids, such as the Dell Farm Crew. Gangs divide Harri's school and surrounding area into "territories," thereby controlling the movement of kids like Harri. As a result, Harri dreams of being about to fly free like a bird.

☝ The flowers on the coffin said Son and Forever. But it felt like Forever was already finished. It felt like somebody took it away when they killed the dead boy. It's not supposed to happen. Children aren't supposed to die, only old people. It even made me worried for if I was next. I spat out the rest of my Atomic Apple Hubba Bubba for if I swallowed it by mistake and my guts all got stuck together.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), The Dead Boy

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

At the dead boy's funeral, Harri is confused by the fact that there is no singing or dancing and that not everyone is allowed inside the church. He and Dean try to search the crowd for suspicious behavior but don't have much luck. Here, Harri reflects on the tragedy of the boy's death. His comment that "it felt like Forever was already finished," speaks to the injustice of children dying when they have their whole life ahead of them. Most children find it hard to imagine their own deaths, and as a result, their future feels like "forever." It is not until adolescence and adulthood that many people begin to reckon with their own mortality. However, the boy's death makes Harri "worried for if I was next." This illustrates the way in which cycles of violence and death force children to lose their innocence.

☝ We're proper detectives now. It's a personal mission. The dead boy even told the rogues to leave me alone one time when they were hooting me for wearing ankle-freezers (that's when the legs of your trousers are too short). I didn't even ask him, he just helped me for no reason. Wanted him to be my friend after that but he got killed before it came true. That's why I have to help him now, he was my friend even if he didn't know about it. He was my first friend who got killed and it hurts too much to forget.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), The Dead Boy

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 47-48

Explanation and Analysis

Harri has just described how he and Dean searched near the river for the murder weapon. He proudly announces that the two boys are now "proper detectives," and explains the motivation behind his desire to find the dead boy's killer. Although Harri and the dead boy did not get a chance to realize the full potential of their friendship, it is clear that the dead boy was innocent, kind, and caring—much like Harri himself. Furthermore, the fact that the dead boy defended Harri from "the rogues" suggests that he was brave enough to stand up to bullies. This could provide a clue as to why he was killed, as the cultural norms of Harri's neighborhood require that people show respect and deference to bullies such as the Dell Farm Crew.

April Quotes

☝☝ Altaf is very quiet. Nobody really knows him. You're not supposed to talk to Somalis because they're pirates. Everybody agrees. If you talk to them you might give away a clue to where you keep your treasure and the next

thing you know, your wife has been strangled alive and they're throwing you to the sharks. Me and Altaf don't have to go to RE. Mamma doesn't want me to hear about the false gods, she says it's a waste of time, and Altaf's mamma thinks the same thing.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Mamma, Altaf

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Harri discusses school, and particularly a shy Somali boy named Altaf. Harri claims that “nobody really knows” Altaf, and then adds that “you are not supposed to talk to Somalis,” illustrating a vicious circle of prejudice and ignorance. The kids at Harri’s school do not talk to Somalis because of prejudice against them, but this means that the prejudice is never disproven.

There is a parallel here between the children’s treatment of Altaf and Mamma and Altaf’s mom’s attitude toward other religions. Mamma claims it is a “waste of time” to learn about other religions, but this is arguably in part due to her lack of knowledge about other religions, as well as her fervent belief in the truth of Christianity. Perhaps if Mamma did study other religions and knew more about them, she would see the value in learning about them—even if she herself remains a Christian.

☝☝ Some rules I have learned from my new school:

No running on the stairs.

No singing in class.

Always put your hand up before you ask a question.

Don't swallow the gum or it will get stuck in your guts and you'll die.

Jumping in the puddle means you're a retard (I don't even agree with this one).

Going around the puddle means you're a girl.

The last one in close the door.

The first one to answer the question loves the teacher.

If a girl looks at you three times in a row it means she loves you.

If you look at her back you love her.

He who smelt it dealt it.

He who denied it supplied it.

He who sensed it dispensed it.

He who knew it blew it.

He who noted it floated it.

He who declared it aired it.

He who spoke it broke it.

He who exposed it composed it.

He who blamed it flamed it.

(All these are just for farts.)

If you look at the back of a mirror you'll see the devil.

Don't eat the soup. The dinner ladies pissed in it.

Don't lend Ross Kelly your pen. He picks his arse klinkers with it.

Keep to the left (everywhere). The right is out of bounds.

The library stairs are safe.

If he wears a pinky ring he's a gay (a pinky ring is a ring on your little finger).

If she wears a bracelet on her ankle she's a lesbian (shags it up with other ladies).

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 63-64

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Harri lists “rules” that he has learned in his new school. The list demonstrates the large amount of new information Harri learns not only as a Year 7 student—note

that in the UK, students start high school (secondary school) in Year 7—but also as a recent immigrant to London. Of course, as the list shows, much of this information is silly, useless, or nonsensical, such as the many points related to farts.

Other parts of the list reveal the extent to which prejudice is infused within the social world of Harri's school. Harri seems to accept much of this even when he doesn't fully understand what it means. For example, it appears as though Harri did not know what a lesbian was before learning the "rule" about girls wearing ankle bracelets. On the other hand, Harri also rejects some of the prejudice that is circulated around school as if it were common knowledge. He doesn't "agree" with the rule that "jumping in a puddle means you're a retard," likely because he himself enjoys jumping in puddles. Harri may be willing to overlook prejudice, but only in certain situations.

●● In football nobody used to pass to me. I thought it meant they hated me. Then I found out it's because I used the wrong command. Instead of saying pass to me you have to say man on. Apart from that the rules are the same as where I used to live. Vilis still doesn't pass to me but I don't care. Where he comes from (Latvia) they burn black people into tar and make roads out of them. Everybody agrees.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Vilis

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

Harri has explained that the best brands for running shoes are Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Puma, and K-Swiss, in that order. The other kids tease Harri for not having brand-name running shoes, but Harri thinks his classmates are just jealous because his running shoes are the fastest. In this passage, Harri gives another example of the difficulty of "reading" and assimilating into a different culture. It took him a while to understand that people weren't passing to him in football simply because he was not giving the signal used in England.

Of course, the challenges Harri faces in adjusting to life in London are compounded by the fact that some people in his new city really do "hate" him, such as Vilis. Vilis' racist views seem to emerge from Latvian culture, and it is possible that

he hopes to deflect negative attention he might receive as a Latvian immigrant by bullying Harri instead. Harri often uses the phrase "everybody agrees" to indicate a view that other people do not question. However, this does not necessarily mean that they agree—it is likely that at least some children know that black people are not used to make roads in Latvia. However, they do not have the courage to stand up for Harri and disagree with Vilis.

●● Auntie Sonia burned her fingers to get the fingerprints off. Now she has no fingerprints at all. It's so if the police catch her they can't send her away. Your fingerprints tell them who you are. If you have no fingerprints, you can't be anybody. Then they don't know where you belong so they can't send you back. Then they have to let you stay.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Auntie Sonia

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Harri and his family have gone on the tube to visit Auntie Sonia at her apartment. Despite Mamma's resistance, Auntie Sonia has decided to tell Harri and Lydia about how she burns her fingerprints off by pressing her fingers on the stove. In this passage, Harri's reflects on Auntie Sonia's reasoning for burning off her fingerprints. He concludes that because fingerprints give people a unique identity, without fingerprints "you can't be anybody" and don't belong anywhere. While this may sound like a rather terrible mode of existence, for undocumented immigrants like Sonia, it actually is a preferable state. Due to prejudice and the restrictions created by borders, Sonia's identity as an undocumented African immigrant effectively traps her, limits her options in life, and puts her at risk of incarceration and deportation.

●● Auntie Sonia hasn't even done anything bad. She's never killed anybody or stolen anything. She just likes to go to different places. She likes to see the different things there. Some of the countries won't let you in if you're black. You have to sneak in. When you're in you just act like everybody else. Auntie Sonia only does the same things as them. She goes to work and shopping. She eats her dinner and goes to the park.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Auntie Sonia

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 93-94

Explanation and Analysis

Auntie Sonia has explained to Harri and Lydia how she burns off her fingerprints in order to avoid being caught illegally crossing borders. In this passage, Harri explains that Sonia isn't a criminal, even though she is treated like one because of immigration laws. His thoughts reflect the absurdity and injustice of such laws. Not only do these immigration laws have a strong element of racism ("some of the countries won't let you in if you're black"), they also target people who are completely ordinary and harmless. As Harri points out, Auntie Sonia is a normal person who works, contributes to the economy, and pursues ordinary activities without harming anyone. Yet the fact that she wants to travel—an activity that more privileged people can pursue with ease—is treated as a criminal offence.

May Quotes

☝ I just wanted to get your attention, Harri, get you out of another mess. I'm trying to help you while I still can, I'm trying my best but there's only so much I can do from here [...] Home will always find you if you walk true and taller than those weeds. You can be a tree, you can be as big as you want to be.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

Harri has just helped the Dell Farm Crew to rob Mr. Frimpong but fled while X-Fire was taking Mr. Frimpong's wallet. After this encounter, a pigeon tells Harri that it was trying to get Harri's attention during the robbery. The pigeon's words in this passage indicate that it serves as Harri's guardian angel. It wants to protect Harri and ensure that he stays "true" to himself. The pigeon's use of lyrical, metaphorical language means that it can be hard to pinpoint

exactly what the pigeon means, but it seems that the "weeds" it refers to are the Dell Farm Crew, who are trying to prevent Harri from growing and blossoming into a kind, responsible, "true" person.

The tree metaphor in this passage is also significant in light of the theme of home and the immigrant experience. Harri's desire to fly like a pigeon speaks to his desire for freedom and his wish to move through the world unrestricted. However, the pigeon here suggests that Harri should focus on being more like a tree: a stable being with solid roots that keep it upright and strong, even in the face of bullying, peer pressure, and violence.

☝ In England nobody helps you if you fall over. They can't tell if you're serious or if it's just a trick. It's too hard to know what's real.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Mr. Frimpong

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Instead of singing in church like he usually does, Mr. Frimpong instead laments over the fact that strangers don't help one another in England—just as no one came to Mr. Frimpong's aid while he was being robbed by the Dell Farm Crew. Listening to Mr. Frimpong's words, Harri makes a remarkably sophisticated observation about English culture. In this passage, Harri suggests that British people's famous aversion to sincerity results in an inability to distinguish between what's "serious" and "what's a trick." As a result, people are reluctant to help one another and may ignore someone who is truly in distress.

☛ Wars

Kids vs Teachers

Northwell Manor High vs Leabridge High

Dell Farm Crew vs Lewsey Hill Crew

Emos vs Sunshine

Turkey vs Russia

Arsenal vs Chelsea

Black vs White

Police vs Kids

God vs Allah

Chicken Joe's vs KFC

Cats vs Dogs

Aliens vs Predators

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker)

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Harri has just stated that there is a war going on, but that he hasn't seen it. In this passage, he lists the "wars" that he knows are happening around him. As with Harri's list of "rules" that he learned in school, some of these wars are more serious than others, while others are entirely silly and trivial. This contrast highlights the way in which children sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between what is serious and what is silly. Of course, this has serious repercussions, because it means that children such as Harri do not take the violence seriously enough, thereby putting themselves at risk or wrongly turning violence into a game.

June Quotes

☛ Signs of guilt include:

Ants in your pant

Talking too fast

Always looking around you like you've lost something

Smoking too much

Crying too much

Scratching

Biting your fingers

Spitting

Sudden bouts of violence

Uncontrolled gas (farting a lot)

Religious hysteria

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Dean

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 155-156

Explanation and Analysis

Harri and Dean are on a "stake out," watching everyone around Harri's tower block for signs of suspicious behavior. They have drawn up a list of "signs of guilt," which ranges from "ants in your pant" to "crying too much." Once again, Harri's serious and valid insight into the world is intermingled with silly thoughts and illogical reasoning. While some of the behaviors he lists here could genuinely help identify a criminal, others are far too vague to be useful. For example, while a criminal might be "smoking too much" out of guilt, there are plenty of other reasons why a person might be smoking a lot. Furthermore, some of Harri's observations—such as "uncontrolled gas"—do not have a real connection to criminal guilt and instead point Harri's innocent, childlike sense of humor.

“ I wonder what Heaven is really like. Is it different for kids than for grown-ups. Like would there still be somebody there telling him to come in

from playing football when it got too dark. The dead boy could do the most tricks, he could flick the ball up with his heel and keep it up for donkey hours with both feet. He always aimed his shots for the corners like you're supposed

to and he was even good at heading. He was good at everything. I wonder if there's dogs like Asbo who steal your ball. That would be funny. I hope in Heaven the animals can all talk, then they can tell you when they're happy so

you don't have to guess. You can usually tell from the eyes but it only works on bigger animals, not pigeons or flies. Their eyes only look sad.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), The Dead Boy

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

Harri and Lydia have just watched a news segment about the dead boy. In the segment, a man speaks about the boy, and Harri is struck by how much the man clearly misses him. In this passage, Harri thinks about heaven, wondering what it is “really like.” Harri is clearly comforted by thinking about heaven, and particularly by the idea of the dead boy getting to live out the happy, carefree childhood that was taken away from him. Harri also imagines heaven as a place where the restrictions and limitations that exist in the real world do not exist. In Harri’s version of heaven, animals talk in real life, rather than just in Harri’s imagination. Once again, this emphasizes Harri’s vibrant imagination and innocence, which is juxtaposed with the bleak reality of the dead boy’s murder.

“ If Agnes dies I'll just swap places with her. She can have my life. I'll give it to her and I'll die instead. I wouldn't mind because I've already lived for a long time. Agnes has only lived for one year and some. I hope God lets me. I don't

mind going to Heaven early. If he wants me to swap places, I will. I just hope I can try Haribo Horror Mix first (they're my favourite of all the Haribo styles. The sweets are all crazy shapes, like bats and spiders and ghosts. Mamma says it's against God but she just worries too much).

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Agnes

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

Agnes has a fever, and despite Grandma Ama’s assurances that she will be fine Harri becomes terrifying that she is going to die. Harri knows a baby who died of fever, so he is convinced that the same thing is going to happen to Agnes. In this passage, Harri resolves to “swap places with Agnes” if she dies and go “to Heaven early.” Harri’s thoughts in this passage show his selflessness and genuine love for his family. Although he is only eleven himself, Harri claims that he would give up his life to ensure that Agnes gets to live longer. The fact that the only thing Harri wants to experience before his death is tasting Haribo Horror Mix—a type of candy—highlights how innocent and young he is. Of course, there are many more experiences that Harri should have before his death. Harri’s vow to swap places with Agnes also foreshadows the end of the novel, as Agnes recovers from her fever, and Harri is murdered.

“ I love it when you get a good surprise. Like the cement being there just waiting for us to write in it or like when you think somebody will be rubbish at something and then you find out they're actually brilliant at it. It was the same with Manik: nobody suspected him to be such a good goalie because he's so fat, but actually Manik's a brilliant goalie. It's impossible to score against him. Nothing ever gets past him [...] I didn't think Dean would be such a good climber because he has orange hair. I just didn't suspect it. But actually he's a brilliant climber.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Dean, Manik, Lydia

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

On Lydia’s birthday, Harri takes her to some wet cement as a surprise. They leave footprints and write their names in the wet cement so everyone will know that they were there. The “surprise” of the cement leads Harri to think about

other forms of “surprise,” and, in doing so, reflect on the nature of prejudice. Harri indicates that prejudice is often a matter of underestimating or having negative biases toward someone, but these opinions are usually disproven when you actually get to know the person. He presents overcoming prejudice as a kind of joyful surprise, like a treat for the person whose negative assumptions are proven wrong.

July Quotes

☝☝ Fingerprints are just for feeling with and to help you hold onto things when they're wet. They don't really mean anything. If you didn't have fingerprints you could be anyone you wanted.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Auntie Sonia

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, which opens the chapter set in July, Harri learns about the functions of different parts of the body in science class. He repeats the statement that “if you didn’t have fingerprints you could be anyone you wanted,” showing how fingerprints are closely tied to one’s entire identity, not just his or her physical makeup.

However, his realization that fingerprints “don’t really mean anything,” perhaps speaks to his developing understanding of immigration, criminality, and injustice. It seems as if Harri now understands that Auntie Sonia shouldn’t have to burn off her fingerprints, as it is not her fingerprints that are the problem—it is unjust laws. However, since such unjust laws deem Auntie Sonia a criminal, her fingerprints could potentially expose her identity, which might send her to prison. By burning off her fingerprints, she can “be anyone” that she wants to be and travel freely.

☝☝ I ran fast. I ran down the hill and through the tunnel. I shouted:

Me: 'Poppy I love you!'

It made a mighty echo. Nobody else heard it.

I ran past the real church. I ran past the cross.

I ran past the Jubilee.

I ran past the CCTV camera. I let it snap me for luck.

I ran past the other pigeons. I pretended they called hello to me.

Me: 'Pigeons I love you!'

It didn't even feel stupid, it felt brilliant. I ran past the playground and the dead climbing frame. I was running superfast. I was going faster than I've ever gone, my feet were just a blur. Nobody could ever catch me, I was going to break the world record.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Poppy Morgan

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

On the last day of school before the summer holiday, Poppy kisses Harri and gives him her phone number. This leads Harri to run down the hill joyfully, feeling boundless love for everything around him. This passage conveys Harri’s goodness, and purity. By pretending the pigeons are saying hello to him, Harri emphasizes his vibrant imagination, young age, and his innocence. His happiness and love become a driving force that enables him to run “faster than I’ve ever gone.” However, his declaration that “nobody could ever catch me,” sadly turns out to be untrue, foreshadowing his impending murder and revealing that innocence and purity are no match for the violence and evil that enshrouds his neighborhood.

●● Pigeon: 'Don't worry, you'll be going home soon. When it's time to go I'll show you the way.'

Me: 'Can't I stay here?'

Pigeon: 'It's not up to me. You've been called home.'

Me: 'It hurts. Do you work for God?'

Pigeon: 'I'm sorry if it hurts. It won't be long now.'

Me: 'I like your feet. They're nice and scratchy. I like all your colours.'

Pigeon: 'Thank you. I like you too, I always did. There's nothing to be scared of.'

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

After the last day of school ends, Harri runs home joyfully, speeding down the hill. However, when he nears his house, a person jumps out and stabs him, leaving Harri in shock and bleeding to death. Harri's special pigeon reappears and assures Harri that he will be "going home soon," which Harri seems to interpret as meaning heaven. In this way, Harri comprehends the fact that he is dying and draws on his Christian faith as a way to understand what will happen to him. However, it is left deliberately ambiguous whether the pigeon actually means that Harri is "going home" to heaven. Readers do not know where the pigeon is taking Harri or if it "work[s] for God," pointing to the way that death and life after death is a mystery—just like the mystery of the dead boy that Harri tried to solve during his lifetime.

Even in Harri's final moments, he remains innocent and loving, fixated by the pigeon's "nice and scratchy" "feet" and pretty "colours." Even while bleeding to death, Harri remains an open-hearted and loving person and turns to his

love of pigeons for comfort.

●● You could see the blood. It was darker than you thought. It just felt too crazy, I couldn't keep my eyes open. I just wanted to remember, if I could remember it would be alright. Agnes's tiny fat fingers and face. I couldn't see it anymore. All babies look the same.

Related Characters: Harrison Opoku (Harri) (speaker), Agnes

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

Harri has been stabbed, and, after a visit from the pigeon assuring him that he will be "going home soon," lies on the ground, dying. In this passage, Harri describes his shock at being stabbed and his attempt to cling onto life. The fact that he chooses to picture his little sister, Agnes, as a way of remaining alive is significant. As a baby, Agnes represents life, the future, and possibility—all of which have been robbed from Harri at far too young an age.

Harri's thoughts of Agnes suggest that perhaps his earlier bargain with God has indeed come true, and that Harri is dying now because Agnes was spared from her fever earlier in the novel. The haunting final sentence—"All babies look the same"—reminds us of Harri's innocence. While the word "baby" ostensibly refers to Agnes, it could also be applied to Harri. Despite being an innocent child who is really no more than a "baby," Harri's life has been taken in a senseless, horrific act of violence. In this way, the idea that "all babies look the same" points to the way that the senseless gang violence in Harri's neighborhood targets all children. All innocent children are at risk of being targeted by violence, just like Harri and the dead boy.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

MARCH

Harri sees blood outside Chicken Joe's, and Jordan offers him one pound to touch it. Harri is tempted, but there is police tape around the blood saying, "DO NOT CROSS." The dead boy's mother is nearby, "guarding the blood." A **pigeon** walks past looking for food. Its eyes look sad. Nearby, there is a pile of flowers, pictures of the boy in his school uniform, bottles of beer, and messages of love. The boy's football boots are there—Nikes, almost brand new. Jordan proposes stealing them, and Harri doesn't reply. Harri was "half friends" with the dead boy, who was older and went to a different school. He prays for the boy, thinking about a chief back in Ghana who brought his son back from the dead.

The opening of the novel establishes that Harri and his friends are young and still rather innocent and naïve. This is revealed by the fact that they dare each other to touch the dead boy's blood, and that Jordan considers stealing the boy's shoes. The juxtaposition between this youth and naiveté and the boy's death is jarring. Harri may be young, but he already has to deal with the painful, frightening issues of violent crime and death.



Harri leaves a bouncy ball for the dead boy; Jordan leaves a pebble he found on the ground. Harri then gives Jordan a strawberry Chewit candy to give to the boy. They run home, and Harri gets there first. He boasts that he is "the fastest in Year 7." Harri lives on the ninth floor of a fourteen-story tower block named Copenhagen House. He loves looking down from his balcony and going up in the lift. Sometimes he stands at the bottom of the tower and holds his arms out, feeling the wind rush around him and pretending to be a bird.

This passage further emphasizes Harri's innocence. The objects he chooses to leave for the boy convey Harri's own childlike nature alongside the fact that the boy was also only a child when he was killed. Although the boy's death is obviously traumatic, it has not destroyed Harri's childlike joy and love for the world, as shown by his habit of pretending to be a bird.



Harri observes that in England, there are lots of different words that mean the same thing. For example, "gay and dumb and lame all mean the same." When Harri started at his new school, Connor Green tried to trick him into saying the sentence "I have a penis." Harri likes to stand on his balcony and watch the helicopters. He sees X-Fire paint his name on the wall of the next tower block, Stockholm House. He wonders who would stab a boy just to get his Chicken Joe's.

Having recently moved to England, Harri has to master not only the version of English spoken in his London community, but also the norms and customs that accompany it. Connor Green's attempt to make him say "I have a penis" illustrates that Harri is made vulnerable by being a young immigrant.



On the phone, Harri tells Papa that a **pigeon** flew into their flat, and that Lydia was scared. Harri put flour on his hand, and the pigeon flew into it. Harri was thrilled, thinking that this was now his "special pigeon." He let the pigeon fly away from the balcony. Papa says, "good work," and Harri can hear him smiling. Harri observes that people in England are very paranoid about germs, especially Vilis, who runs away from Harri because he claims that if he breathes African germs he will die.

The novel frequently draws a parallel between pigeons and people, and in this passage, the comparison is specifically between pigeons and African immigrants like Harri. Both Harri and the pigeon are faced with the prejudice of being perceived as dirty. Perhaps this is why Harri feels love and sympathy for the pigeon.



Harri's baby sister Agnes is still in Ghana, where Grandma Ama takes care of her. Once Papa sells everything in his shop, he'll buy tickets for the three of them to join the rest of the family in London. It has been two months since Harri, Mamma, and Lydia moved there. The calling card runs out, and Papa's voice cuts off.

Harri once saw a dead person at the Kaneshie market in Accra. A woman selling oranges was knocked over by a tro-tro, and some of the shoeshine boys tried to steal from her. At Harri's church in London, there is a "special prayer" for the dead boy. Pastor Taylor tells the children that if they know anyone with a knife, they should tell on them. Later, Harri stabs himself with a fork and wonders aloud what it feels like to be stabbed "for real."

On the first day of Harri's new school in London, Manik's papa shows Harri how to tie his school tie. Manik's papa has walked Manik to school ever since the Dell Farm Crew stole Manik's trainers. Harri and Lydia pretend not to know each other at school. At break time, Harri plays a game called "suicide bomber," where you run and crash into other people with the aim of making them fall over. When he's not playing games, Harri swaps things like football stickers and sweets.

X-Fire demonstrates how to stab someone using his fingers. Harri is "the dead boy." X-Fire explains that it's best to stab someone in a soft part of them because otherwise it feels "disgusting." Dizzy and Clipz join in the discussion, but Killa stays quiet. Harri wonders if this is because Killa has stabbed so many people and that this is how he got his nickname. Harri feels sick when he hears the other boys discuss stabbing, but he forces himself to be still and listen.

Harri and his family always go to the market on Saturdays. His favorite shop is the sweet shop, but he never buys jelly babies in case it reminds Mamma of the dead babies that she sees in real life. At the market, Mamma looks for a **pigeon** net, which upsets Harri. He wants pigeons to fly into the house even though Mamma says they are "dirty." He is relieved to learn that pigeon nets are not sold at the market. While Mamma buys Harri a Chelsea Football (soccer) Club shirt from the clothes stall, Harri sees Jordan steal a phone. The dead boy had the official Chelsea shirt, not a knockoff like Harri's one. Harri loves his shirt even though it's scratchy.

The reader is now introduced to the painful separation involved in Harri's move to London. While half of the family is starting a new life in the UK, the other half have been (temporarily) left behind.



Harri is too young to fully process what happened to the boy, and this is shown by his curiosity about what it feels like to be stabbed. He is no stranger to the reality of death, as shown by the anecdote about the Kaneshie market. However, violent death—and the knife crime epidemic in particular—is still new to him.



Harri's life as an innocent, eleven-year-old child is marred by the omnipresence of violence. This passage details several different kinds of violence, from the Dell Farm Crew bullying and robbing Manik to the game of "suicide bomber." Indeed, this shows the unique way in which children process extreme violence, by turning it into a game.



X-Fire's decision to demonstrate what it is like to stab someone, using Harri as a model, highlights the amount of power that X-Fire and the rest of the Dell Farm Crew have over Harri. Harri's nausea indicates that he doesn't want to know about stabbing someone, yet he has no choice but to listen.



Harri is a joyful, sensitive, and conscientious boy. Indeed, this sensitivity sometimes emerges in an almost comic way, such as when Harri worries that eating jelly babies will remind Mamma of the real dead babies she sees at work. However, Harri's sensitivity is shown to be more tragic when compared to Jordan's theft of the phone or the death of the boy. How long will Harri be able to remain innocent while he is surrounded by violence and death?



Harri is frightened by X-Fire’s dog, Harvey, but likes Terry Takeaway’s dog, Asbo, who is “funny and friendly.” Terry got his nickname because he is always stealing things. He always offers to sell his stolen goods to Harri and Dean even though they are children and don’t have any money. Harri says Terry is “dey touch” because he drinks beer for breakfast.

Harri loves to pee into the toilet just after Mamma bleaches it because he can pretend he is God peeing on a cloud. While on the plane journeying from Ghana to England, Harri saw the top of the clouds. When he couldn’t see **heaven**, Mamma explained that you can’t see heaven “until you’re ready.” Harri wants to see heaven now so he can see what his Grandpa Solomon is doing.

When Harri gets home from school, there many police officers looking around the bushes and bins. One of the cops is a woman, which Harri finds “very crazy.” The female cop asks if anyone knows where the dead boy was on the day of his death or if anyone was “after him.” The kids say no. Dean asks if the police have any leads, and the cop replies that they’re “working on it.” Harri boasts that he saw the dead boy’s blood, which was like a river. He wanted to jump in and swim in it, thinking that this would make it seem as if the dead boy was still there. Harri thinks that if he only knew he had five minutes to live, he would fill the time with all his favorite things.

In music, Harri’s class plays the drums. He teaches Poppy Morgan how to play the bass drum, and while doing so he smells her hair “by mistake.” Poppy’s hair smells like honey, and when she smiles at Harry, it makes his “belly turn over.” From Harri’s balcony, he can see lines of flats, including the flats where elderly people and the “never-normals” live. Jordan’s mom uses the term “never-normals” to mean people who are “not right in the head.”

That night after Mamma and Lydia fall asleep, Harri goes out to the balcony and pours flour on the handrail. He almost spits down onto the ground but stops when he sees someone by the bins. Harri can see that the person is male, and Harri shouts up to the helicopters flying above that it might be the killer. He sees the man pull something that looks like a knife out from under the bin and tuck it into his pants. Then he runs away toward the river. Harri waits for a while in case he sees something else bad, but then goes inside. He is sad that the **pigeon** didn’t come back and wonders if the pigeon thinks Harri is going to kill it. In reality, Harri just wants to feed it and teach it tricks.

In the world of the novel, not all criminality is dark and disturbing. Terry Takeaway’s penchant for theft is treated as a joke, rather than something sinister and disturbing—as is his evident alcoholism.



Harri spends a lot of time thinking about religion, God, and heaven, but his understanding of religion is still rather whimsical, as is typical of children. In particular, Harri has a rather blurred sense of metaphor when it comes to clouds and heaven.



Harri has clearly been profoundly affected by the boy’s death. Even though they were not close friends, Harri ardently wishes that he could bring the boy back from death. The death of someone so young also forces Harri to contemplate his own mortality. Although Harri finds himself imagining what it would be like to have only five minutes left to live, he still has a somewhat unrealistic view of death, as shown by the fact that he thinks he could fill these minutes with his favorite things.



Harri is in the midst of a transition from childhood to adolescence, and as a result does not fully comprehend the changes happening to him—including his own feelings for Poppy. He is able to recognize that she has an effect on him, but due to his childlike innocence, he doesn’t really understand why.



This passage illustrates how Harri’s innocent, childish desire to see the pigeon again gets inadvertently mixed up in criminality, violence, and death. Harri’s decision to shout up to the helicopters illustrates his naiveté. He doesn’t realize that the helicopters will not be able to hear him, and that shouting is actually more likely to endanger him due to the possibility that the person below—or anyone else in his tower block—might hear him.



The narrative is interrupted by a brief passage told from the perspective of the **pigeon**. It says that humans and pigeons are more alike than people think, but “not too alike.” The pigeon pities people, whose “lives are so short and nothing’s even fair.” It didn’t know the dead boy, but it understands grief.

Harri is “the man of the house,” so it’s his job to scare away “invaders.” If an invader comes into the house, Harri will stab them in the eyes with a fork. Harri looks through the peephole and sees Chanelle and Miquita on the other side. He opens all the locks on the door and lets them in. Lydia and her friends like watching *Hollyoaks*, but Harri hates it because it has kissing in it—sometimes even men kissing other men. Harri thinks both Miquita and Chanelle are deejays because they are always talking about the boys they “suck off.” Miquita threatens to kiss Harri, but he says if she does he’ll spit.

Miquita isn’t going to the dead boy’s funeral. She said it was his fault he was killed because “he shouldn’t have been fronting.” Harri tells her she doesn’t know what she’s talking about and that the killer stabbed the boy to steal his Chicken Joe’s. Miquita replies that Harri “don’t know shit” because he’s too young. Harri leaves, furiously thinking that Miquita is “disgusting.”

On the doors of the shopping center, there is a sign that reads, “NO ALCOHOL... NO BICYCLES... NO DOGS... NO SKATEBOARDS... NO SMOKING... NO BALL GAMES.” Beneath, someone has added “NO FUGLIES.” Harri explains that fuglies are girls who immediately get pregnant after you only kiss them. They smell like cigarettes, and so do their babies. Dean is Harri’s second-best friend, after Jordan, who is Harri’s best friend “outside of school.” Dean advises Harri to put his dinner money in his sock so it won’t get stolen.

Dean thinks that CSI should take over the investigation of the dead boy’s murder. He explains that CSI are the best detectives in America, and that they are “real,” not just on TV. Dean tells Harri about the high-tech methods the CSI detectives use to solve crimes, and Harri suggests that they do the same to help find the dead boy’s killer, but Dean points out that they don’t have the right technology. At that moment, Terry Takeaway comes running past, carrying a tray of chicken that drops to the floor. The butcher shouts after him angrily.

The sections of the story narrated by the pigeon are an example of magical realism. The notion that the pigeon would have its own, decidedly lyrical and philosophical consciousness is fantastical, but is treated as normal within an otherwise realist text.



Harri’s feelings about Miquita and Chanelle challenge typical understandings of sexual threat and victimhood. Stereotypically, it is women who are conceptualized as being under threat from men, but in Harri’s case, he is a boy who is sexually victimized by Miquita. Harri’s disgust at “Hollyoaks”—a long-running British soap opera—suggests that he feels intimidated by sexuality in general.



Miquita dismisses Harri for being clueless due to his youth. However, while Miquita may be older and less innocent than Harri, she is not necessarily more mature. Her implication that the dead boy deserved to die is decidedly immature.



Harri’s impression of the world is a confusing mix of fact and fiction, in part because he doesn’t fully understand the prejudices of those around him. For example, he believes that “fuglies” represents a real category of people, rather than an assumption based on people’s prejudices against women (and particularly teenage mothers).



This passage suggests that Dean also has trouble separating fact from fiction. Although the TV program CSI is loosely based on the lives of real detectives, it is not a realistic depiction of criminal investigation. However, Dean is too young and inexperienced to realize that this is the case.



Harri explains that dead babies must be named in order to get into **heaven**. If the parents are too sad or aren't believers, Mamma names the baby for them. Today, a baby died because it was ectopic, meaning it grew outside the womb. Mamma named the baby Katy, which made the mother very happy. Harri suggests that next time she should name the baby Harrison, but Mamma replies that it would be bad luck to do that. Harri was relieved to learn that dead babies grow up in heaven, because he'd hate to be a baby forever.

One of the reasons why Harri is so fascinated by heaven is because his idea of heaven is such a significant contrast to his current life on Earth. In the mortal world, Harri's life is full of change: he has moved to a new country, he is approaching puberty, and his neighborhood is gripped by a tragic murder. As a result, he is intrigued by questions such as whether babies grow up in heaven. His question also shows his innocence, as he's worried if dead babies have to be babies forever, not if dead babies go to hell.



Harri searches for footprints by the bins but can't find any. At break time, he jumps in a puddle and is briefly worried that a nearby bird is going to poop on him. Connor Green explains that in England, it is considered good luck if a bird poops on you. Vilis chimes in that Harri "must be lucky because he smells like shit." When Dean angrily responds, Vilis says something in "his language" and runs away. Harri vows that next time Vilis insults him he will kick him in the crotch.

The fact that Vilis has a language of his own indicates that, like Harri, Vilis and/or his parents are also recent immigrants. Perhaps Vilis bullies Harri in order to deflect any xenophobic prejudice that might otherwise be directed at him.



The dead boy's coffin has a Chelsea Football Club badge on it. Harri thinks his funeral seems very sad because his family is all dressed in black, it is raining, and there is no singing or dancing either. Mamma squeezes Harri and Lydia tightly. They are not allowed inside the church because they were not close enough to the boy, so they wait outside along with a TV crew. The presenter keeps stopping to get her hair fixed, and at one point turns and asks the kids to stop swearing. The kids swear back in response.

Harri is struck by how different the dead boy's funeral is to what he is used to in Ghana. Although Harri doesn't say so explicitly, his thoughts in this passage point to the fact that in Ghana, everyone is welcome to every funeral, and there is singing and dancing rather than somberness and silence. This speaks to the difference in how death is treated in Ghana versus England.



In Ghana, some coffins are in the shape of "what the person loved the most," such as a sewing machine or a taxi. There is singing and dancing, and everyone is allowed to join in. Harri whispers that the dead boy's coffin should have been a football boot and thinks that he would choose an airplane for himself. Harri sneaks away from Mamma and Lydia and watches the crowd with Dean, looking for signs of suspicious activity. Harri says that the person by the bins had his hood up, but this doesn't help much as it is raining, and everyone has their hoods up. Dean and Harri shake the hands of everyone in the crowd, offering commiserations and trying to look for the killer until someone tells them to go away.

As with "suicide bomber," Dean and Harri process the death of the boy by turning it into a game. Their imitation of the CSI detectives and mission to find the boy's killer turns an otherwise tragic, senseless situation into something fun, and also gives the boys a sense of purpose and power. This is facilitated by the fact that neither Harri or Dean fully grasp their limitations as detectives.



At the end of the funeral, Killa rides by on his bike. He slips off in the rain, and a man attending the funeral shouts at him to watch where he's going. Harri thinks there's going to be a fight, but Killa just cycles away. Harri thinks it's wrong when children die and is scared that he is going to be next.

Harri identifies with the dead boy not only because they were both young, but because the boy's death feels so senseless and random. If the boy was killed just so someone could steal his chicken, Harri could easily be killed as well.



Harri explains that the steps outside the cafeteria “belong to the Dell Farm Crew”—it is the best spot in school, and only they are allowed to sit there. Year elevens are allowed to sit there, but only if they are personally invited by X-Fire. The Dell Farm Crew is named after the Dell Farm Estate. X-Fire is the leader because he is the best at basketball, has stabbed the most people, and stolen the most stuff.

One day, the Dell Farm Crew take Harri’s bag and threaten to throw it on the roof. X-Fire asks where Harri is from, and when Clipz teases him about Ghana, X-Fire tells him to stop, saying Harri’s “alright.” X-Fire says Harri can have his bag back if he does a “job” for him. Harri doesn’t understand, replying that he doesn’t need a job. Dizzy adds that it would be a good idea for Harri to roll with them. X-Fire eventually gives Harri his bag back, saying that if Harri ever needs anything he should come to them.

One of the never-normal women rides a “chair car” because she’s “too fat to walk.” Harri once saw little kids climb on top of it for a ride. Harri loves running in the rain and tasting the drops on his tongue. Auntie Sonia comes over, and Harri and Lydia show off the lift in Copenhagen House. Auntie Sonia tells them about the lifts in America, which are called elevators. Auntie Sonia has “been everywhere.” She once made Will Smith’s bed while working as a hotel maid. Auntie Sonia’s fingertips are “all black and cracked,” but Harri pretends not to notice. Mamma tells Auntie Sonia about a woman who was racist to her at work, requesting another midwife because she didn’t want an immigrant.

Jordan was expelled from school for kicking a teacher. Jordan is mixed-race, and his mother is obruni, which Harri finds crazy. Jordan’s mom wants to find another school for her son, but Jordan wants to stop going altogether and instead stay at home watching DVDs and playing Xbox. Jordan spits on the buttons of the lift; Fag Ash Lil presses them and exclaims in horror. Harri is scared of Fag Ash Lil because she killed her husband and baked him into a pie.

In art class, Poppy sits next to Harri and paints her fingernails with paints. She does it very slowly, and it makes Harri feel relaxed to watch her. Harri’s art teacher tells the class to take inspiration from anywhere for their picture, and Harri paints with yellow after being inspired by Poppy’s hair. He paints with green for the time Agnes found a cricket in the grass, and red for the dead boy’s blood. However, he can’t mix the right shade of red and gets frustrated to the point that his vision becomes blurry. He gives up.

This passage shows that in Harri’s school, violence and criminality are valued in the same way as skills such as basketball playing. For kids like Harri who are young and impressionable, this is bound to create a distorted sense of values.



X-Fire at first appears friendly and sympathetic, at least in comparison to the rest of the Dell Farm Crew. However, it soon becomes clear that this is because he wants to recruit Harri. He sees Harri as a means to an end rather than a person to be respected in his own right.



This passage illustrates some of the different types of prejudice that exist within Harri’s community. The term “never-normal” is, of course, an example of prejudice against those with mental and physical disabilities, as is Harri’s description of the “chair car lady” and his assumption that she is “too fat to walk.” Meanwhile, Mamma’s experience of prejudice at work shows how powerful and pervasive discrimination is—even within a markedly multiethnic community.



Once again, Harri’s understanding of the world is idiosyncratic in a somewhat comical way. He finds it easier to believe that Fag Ash Lil killed her husband and baked him into a pie than he does to believe that Jordan has a black father and a white mother.



Harri’s list of inspirations for the colors he chooses highlight the mix of innocence and violence, joy and trauma that characterizes his experience of the world. Even as he happily stares at Poppy’s hair, he cannot help but be reminded of the dead boy’s death and the color of his blood.



There is a fence with spikes surrounding Harri's school and a sign that says, "No climbing, serious risk of injury." Harri and Dean's favorite sign is one by the river warning people that the watercress growing there is "not fit for human consumption." They search near the river for the murder weapon, and Harri boasts that they are "proper detectives now." Harri explains that the dead boy was once nice to him, and that he wanted them to become friends, but then the boy was killed. The boys wonder how much of a reward they'll get if they catch the killer. Dean suggests they might get one thousand pounds, and Harri thinks that if this happens, he'll use the money to buy tickets for Papa, Agnes, and Grandma Ama to come to England.

Dean double-checks with Harri that the person by the bins retrieved a knife, and Harri confirms, demonstrating how big the knife was with his hands. However, Harri is worried because he knows that if the killer threw the knife in the river it will have already drifted out to sea. There are no fish or ducks in the river; Harri explains that the younger kids killed the ducks with a screwdriver.

APRIL

Harri's family does laundry in the laundromat at the bottom of Luxembourg House. Sometimes Harri and Lydia play a game where they get points for spotting different pieces of clothing (such as underwear and bras) in the machines. Harri then describes a shy Somali boy named Altaf, explaining, "you're not supposed to talk to Somalis because they're pirates." Both Harri and Altaf skip RE (Religious Education) because their mothers do not want them to learn about other religions. Instead the two boys go to the library, where they start a conversation about whether being human is better than being a robot. Altaf wants to design cars when he grows up and does "bo-styles" drawings. Harri reasons that Altaf can't be a pirate because he's afraid of water.

Harri sees people die on the news every day, usually children. If a child dies, Mamma "prays the hardest," and Harri concludes that adults love sad news. The news today says that the dead boy still hasn't been found. Harri asks Mamma what she thinks the killer looks like and whether he is black or white, but Mamma replies that she doesn't know. Harri thinks that all killers look the same: they have "piggy eyes," smoke cigarettes, their eyes are red, and they're always spitting. Harri thinks that if they catch the dead boy's killer, it will be "like getting Forever back," turning everything back to the way it's supposed to be.

Harri and Dean's pursuit of the killer is on one level motivated by their own desire to be cool, impressive detectives and to secure the reward money. However, this passage emphasizes that Harri's desire to find the killer is still largely altruistic. He wants to do justice to the boy because he thought he was kind, and Harri plans to use the reward money in order to unite his family. Harri may be somewhat naïve, but he is also notably selfless and caring.



Note the contrast between this rather grim scene and Harri's earlier, happy memory of Agnes finding a cricket. In London, access to nature is tainted by the constant presence of violence. Even the younger children are so violent that they gruesomely kill the ducks with a screwdriver.



There is a clear irony in the fact that Harri and Altaf's friendship begins because both of their mothers forbid them from participating in RE. Both mothers harbor prejudice against other religions—prejudice so intense, that they disagree with even learning about other faiths. However, this advertently ends up bringing their sons together and encouraging Harri to get over the prejudice against Somalis. (Note that although Altaf's religion is not specified, the vast majority of Somalis are Muslim, and we can thus infer that he and Harri are of different faiths.)



Again, Harri has his own way of processing trauma and grief, and he struggles to understand the way that adults deal with it. He is confused by Mamma's prayers and interest in the news, thinking this means she "loves" when sad things happen. Similarly, Harri has a rather limited, cartoonish idea of what murderers are like. This is based more on stereotypes, prejudice, and Harri's own imagination than it is on reality.



Connor Green once said that if a dog attacks you, you should put your finger in its bumhole. After that, everyone started calling Connor a pervert. Nathan Boyd is known as being fearless and even once fulfilled a dare to lick a crack spoon. This made him the official “bravest in Year 7.” However, even Nathan has never been brave enough to set the fire alarm off. Although it is a crime to set the fire alarm off if there isn’t a real fire, X-Fire asks Harri to do just that. Harri reasons that if he joins the Dell Farm Crew, Vilis won’t be able to bully him anymore. X-Fire says Harri needs to set off the alarm, so they can be sure he’s “got what it takes.”

Harri waits for a group of people to pass and then hits the fire alarm while X-Fire and Dizzy wait nearby. Harri tries his hardest, but the fire alarm glass does not break. X-Fire and Dizzy run away, and Dizzy shouts “Pussy boy!” over his shoulder. Harri eventually runs away as well, worrying that the Dell Farm Crew are now his enemies. He curses: “Adjei, my hands are too soft for everything!”

Harri describes Mr. Frimpong, the loudest singer in church. Mr. Frimpong once fainted during church, and Pastor Taylor had to wake him up. At church today, the congregation prays for the dead boy’s mother and asks God to help the police catch the killer. Harri’s science teacher, Mr. Tomlin, is the most intelligent person Harri knows, and he thinks that if Mr. Tomlin joined the investigation, they’d find the killer right away. Dean doesn’t believe in God, so Harri prays on behalf of both of them.

Harri and Dean go to the pub to interview suspects. The air smells of alcohol, and they try not to breathe it in so that they don’t get drunk. Dean asks about the race of the man who Harri saw by the bins, and Harri replies that he thinks the man was black, but he isn’t certain. He adds that he was fairly short. The two boys identify a suspect who is angrily shaking the fruit machine.

The man sees them and asks if they’re waiting for someone, and Dean replies that they’re waiting for his dad. Dean then asks the suspect if he knew the dead boy, and the suspect replies that he didn’t, and he wish he knew who the killer was. He adds: “These f—king kids, they need drowning at birth.” Speaking to Harri, Dean laments that the suspects are never going to give up any useful information. He suggests a change of tactic: they search for evidence themselves using “surveillance and evidence” such as fingerprints and DNA. Harri pretends to consider this suggestion, when he doesn’t actually know what Dean is talking about.

Harri’s motivation for setting off the fire alarm illustrates that he is especially vulnerable to getting involved in crime and gang activity because of his national and racial identity. Vilis bullies him because he is a black African immigrant, and Harri thus dreams of showing strength by having a crew to back him up. Unfortunately, this means doing things—such as engaging in criminal activity—that Harri does not actually want to do.



It remains ambiguous whether Harri’s hands were indeed “too soft” or whether he—consciously or unconsciously—was not able to break the fire alarm glass because he did not truly want to do it. Either way, Harri’s soft hands are a metaphor for his sensitive, caring, and innocent soul.



Harri and his community are turning everywhere in the hope of finding someone who will help solve the murder case—whether that be Mr. Tomlin or God. This demonstrates a fundamental lack of trust in the police, who are characterized throughout the book as being inept and largely irrelevant.



Harri and Dean’s belief that they can become drunk through simply breathing in the pub air serves as yet another reminder of their innocence and cluelessness. Their limited grasp of the world makes it hard to believe that they will be able to solve the case.



Dean sounds impressive when he discusses surveillance and DNA, which makes Harri embarrassed to admit that he doesn’t understand Dean’s words. On the other hand, it is worth noting that Dean probably has an extremely limited understanding of these things himself, given that everything he has learned about them has come through television.



The narrative once again switches to the perspective of the **pigeon**, who says that violence has always come “too easy” to humankind. Harri describes a time when Kyle Barnes stabbed Manik with a compass in order to make him scream. The kids all discuss which weapon would be the best. Harri suggests an umbrella that’s secretly a poisoned gun. When Brayden Campbell boasts about shooting an AK-47 one-handed, Harri and Dean say “My arse” simultaneously and say jinx straight away to avoid being cursed. Harri gives a long list of rules and customs he learned at school.

The Dell Farm Crew waits for Harri and Dean outside the cafeteria and block their way, calling them “pussy boys.” Clipz mentions that Harri “failed the test,” but X-Fire assures him he’ll think of something easier next time. The crew force Dean to hand over his one pound, which makes Dean sad. Harri tries to reassure him that if he was black, the Dell Farm Crew would let him join as well, but Dean replies that he doesn’t want to. He says he hates them, and Harri agrees. After school, Harri and Dean find an old mattress and jump on it like a trampoline. They consider charging the younger kids fifty pence to use it, but then Terry Takeaway comes by, and his dog, Asbo, pees all over it.

Back in Ghana, Harri helped make the roof for Papa’s shop and made sure that it was “proper strong.” Harri felt proud of himself after. The rest of the family came to look at the shop and were happy as well. Papa was good at making things, and taught Harri how to saw properly. Harri hates that Mamma has to work at night as well as day; he wishes babies were only born in the daytime. He wishes Mamma was at home now, because Miquita has just arrived. Miquita and Lydia try on their parrot costumes for the carnival. Miquita keeps shaking her bum in Harri’s face. He leaves to go and listen to his CD player in the other room.

Later, while heading to the bathroom, Harri sees Miquita give Lydia a Nisa bag before she leaves. They look inside it as if it contains “some kind of crazy treasure,” and then seem frightened when they notice Harri watching them. Miquita leaves, and Harri asks if she’s going to the laundromat, saying he wants to come too. Lydia says no, but Harri follows her anyway, hiding behind a corner so she doesn’t see him. He watches her pour bleach all over the bag of clothes, doing “everything proper fast like it was a mission.”

Some of the customs that exist at Harri’s school are entirely innocent, such as the game of jinx. However, it is clear that the pigeon’s words are right, and that violence does indeed come “too easy” to humans—including children. This is demonstrated by the fact that Harri and the other kids fantasize about weapons and stab each other with compasses for fun.



This passage illustrates Harri’s ambivalent feelings about the Dell Farm Crew. He is grateful not to be robbed by them and perhaps enjoys the sense of affinity that emerges from the fact that he is spared because he is black. On the other hand, he is not particularly enthusiastic about joining their group, and as soon as Dean says that he “hates them,” Harri feels able to admit the same thing.



This passage contrasts different kinds of masculinity and maturity, highlighting Harri’s difficulty in navigating the transition from childhood to adolescence. Harri enjoys the feeling of responsibility and maturity he gets from helping Papa—who is a role model of positive masculinity—build the roof. However, Harri is disgusted by the idea of sexuality and Miquita’s expectation that he respond to her attempts to seduce him.



Harri’s limited perspective produces its own series of “clues,” leaving the reader in the position of detective trying to piece everything together. The Nisa bag seems ordinary (Nisa is a chain of small grocery stores in the UK), so why are Lydia and Miquita looking at it like it contains treasure? Harri’s description of Lydia being on a “mission” recalls his own detective mission, but it seems that Lydia’s mission is less innocent than Harri’s.



When Lydia is done, she bumps into Harri and curses him for following her. Harri asks what was in the bag, and she says it was just leftover bits of the costume, but Harri can tell she is lying. Harri saw that the clothes Lydia had been bleaching were “boy’s clothes,” and that they were red—the shade of blood. X-Fire approaches them and asks Lydia if anyone saw her. She replies that no one did, and X-Fire tells them to get going.

The death of the boy has suddenly become a lot closer to home for Harri. The fact that Lydia could be involved with the dead boy’s murder—or at least in its cover up—challenges the prospect that there is a clear distinction between innocence and guilt.



Harri explains that the best running shoes are Nike, followed by Adidas, Reebok, Puma, and K-Swiss. His own running shoes, which he bought at the market, are called Sports. The other kids make fun of them, but Harri says they are only jealous because Sports are the fastest. At first, no one would pass to Harri during football (soccer), but then he realized it was because he was signaling wrong. Vilis still won’t pass to him even though Harri uses the right signal now. Vilis calls Harri “so gay,” and Harri calls him “Potato House.”

Although—or perhaps because—Harri’s community is quite poor, brand names and expensive clothes are considered very important. Harri is teased because Sports are not considered a real brand, but he misunderstands the nature of this bullying. Harri views his running shoes for what they can do, not what status they give him.



A wasp flies into the room during math class. Poppy is so scared that she almost cries, but Harri reassures her that the wasp is just visiting, then transports it to the window and lets it fly away. The class claps and Poppy thanks Harri. Before Poppy, Harri has only loved one girl, a friend of Lydia’s in Ghana called Abena, who he admits he only loved for one day. Abena was “very stupid” and put soap flakes on her face so she would become obruni. Lydia still chats to Abena via instant message at Computer Club. Abena told Lydia that the skeletons of twins who were missing have been found. Harri explains that people in the north of Ghana kill twins because they think twins are “cursed by the devil.”

The story of Abena shows that the issues Harri faces in London—such as racism, prejudice, and violence—also exist in Ghana, albeit in different forms. Despite growing up in a majority-black country, Abena still internalizes the racist idea that it is better to be white, which is why she attempts to change her skin using soap flakes. Meanwhile, prejudice against twins is so intense that they are sometimes murdered, as in the case that Abena describes.



Harri decides that he wants to kiss Poppy. He also thinks the pound coin looks stupid. Mamma pays money to Julius, who doesn’t think Mamma can count properly even though she can. Harri thinks that Julius is richer than the president and notes that he drives a Mercedes Benz. When Harri and Lydia first came to England, they played a game where they had to shout “obruni!” every time they saw a white person. When they first arrived in their new flat, Harri checked all the furniture to make sure it was there and working. Harri isn’t sure why Mamma gives Julius money. He knows Julius is in love with Auntie Sonia and is “always slapping her behind.” It makes Mamma angry when Julius does that.

At times, Harri has a hard time distinguishing between what is normal and what isn’t. There are certain ordinary things that he finds strange, such as the way the pound coin looks and the fact that there are a lot of white people in England. At the same time, he struggles to understand the relationships that Mamma and Auntie Sonia have to Julius. Harri doesn’t know why Mamma would be giving money to a rich man, why Julius slaps Auntie Sonia’s butt, or why Mamma doesn’t approve of Julius’ behavior.



A tree has been blown over by the wind, and Harri sees a bird's nest in it. He is sad thinking about how the birds were probably crushed by the falling tree. He thinks: "I love all the birds, not just **pigeons**. I love them all." There is a special assembly at school in which a policeman comes and talk about the dead boy. Harri doesn't trust the policeman because he is "too fat," which Harri thinks means he must be lying. Harri feels that there is no way the policeman will be able to catch the killer. He wants to talk to policeman but knows he needs to "stay undercover."

In citizenship class, Harri and Connor draw scars on their skin with pens. Harri concludes that scars look better on white people because you can see them better. After school, men with saws come to cut up the fallen tree. When they get to the branch with the bird's nest, they find it is empty. A younger kid suggests that a cat might have gotten to the birds, which makes Harri furious. He pushes the younger kid over, and the kid runs away. Harri looks at the hole where the tree used to be and feels sad, though he's not sure why.

Harri and Dean decide to use sellotape to gather **fingerprints**. They check the surfaces by the river, having been chased away from the scene of the crime by Chicken Joe, who assumed they were trying to steal the flowers. Dean explains that poppies used to grow by the river, but they were cut down because everyone kept smoking the seeds. Harri enjoys the feeling of searching for fingerprints, which he finds peaceful. He concludes that Dean is "the best partner a detective can have," and that he doesn't even mind that he's ginger.

The first time Harri went on the tube (underground public transit), he found it crazy. He shouted, "We are on the tuuuuuuuuuuuube!" and everyone jumped. He pretended that it was loud enough for Papa and Agnes and Grandma Ama to hear. In Auntie Sonia's flat, "everything looks brand new." Mamma tries to stop Auntie Sonia telling Harri and Lydia about her fingers, but Auntie Sonia insists she doesn't want to lie to them. She explains that she burns her **fingerprints** off on the stove. She presses her fingers there until the skin burns off. The first time she was scared because of the smell of her flesh cooking and cried afterward. She explains that it's easier when you're drunk. Harri observes that her fingers are shiny and black "like a zombie's fingers."

Harri's distrust of the particular policeman that comes to visit his school is unfounded, based only in Harri's own prejudice against overweight people. On the other hand, his distrust of the police in general is more reasonable given the fact that there has still been seemingly little progress in the investigation of the dead boy's murder.



This passage suggests that Harri projects his feelings about the dead boy—along with other traumas and difficulties in life—onto the natural world. This leaves him feeling sad about the birds, even though Harri doesn't even know what happened to them.



This passage contains further illustrations of the kinds of prejudice that Harri and his friends face. Chicken Joe assumes they are going to rob the site of the dead boy's murder, while Dean is teased for being ginger. As was made clear by his friendship with Altaf, Harri seems better than most at letting go of prejudiced views.



Fingerprints are one of the most important symbols in the novel, and here they are introduced in depth for the first time. Auntie Sonia hardly seems like a criminal, so it seems crazy that she would burn her fingers off—particularly given how gruesome and painful it sounds. The fact that Auntie Sonia tells Harri and Lydia about her fingers at all is proof of the difference between her and Mamma. Mamma tries to shield her children from adult matters, whereas Auntie Sonia believes in being upfront and honest.



Auntie Sonia explains that she has a hard time doing certain things with her hands, such as using the TV remote because the buttons are so small. Each time her **fingerprints** grow back, she burns them off again. She promises that she will stop burning them when she settles on where she wants to live. In the meantime, she moves around, living just like anyone else wherever she goes. Auntie Sonia gives Harri a “proper football made from skin,” and Lydia a Tinchy Stryder CD. Harri observes that Sonia always knows exactly what people want. Julius comes back, carrying his baseball bat, and has a drink. He offers Harri some, and then tells Harri to “stay good for as long as you can... stay the way you are.” Harri promises he will.

Back in Ghana, Harri’s favorite barber was called Kwadwo. The barber Harri sees in London is called Mario and is “quite grumpy.” Harri asks for “cornrolls.” Lydia suggests that Harri only wants them because X-Fire has them, but Harri denies this. Harri finds it hilarious that low hair is called “a number two” in England. He concludes that Mario is dey touch.

There is a small playground near Harri’s tower block, with a car, a motorbike, and two ladybirds on springs. However, Harri doesn’t go on them anymore because they’re “gay.” The climbing frame belongs to the Dell Farm Crew, so no one else can go on it, even though the Dell Farm Crew don’t climb—they just sit on it, smoking and yelling at people. A sign by the playground says, “Say No to Strangers,” but Harri observes that “it doesn’t even tell you what the question is.” He points out that strangers might need help, but Jordan replies that they never need help—they just want to “shag you up the arse.” Harri is shocked, musing that Jordan is dey touch.

Harri looks for the murder weapon but only finds drug needles. Jordan likes to boast about the list of bad things he’s done, which include drinking a whole bottle of vodka, deflating the tires of a police car, called an adult a “c—,” and stabbed some people. He makes Harri smash beer bottles with him. Harri doesn’t want to, but he can tell Jordan loves doing it. They see Lydia coming, and Harri gives her a dirty blow on the arm in case Jordan is watching. Harri then tells her it was an accident.

The **pigeon** muses on the tactics humans use to keep pigeons away, such as metal spikes, flypaper, and rifles. In school, Harri learns about volcanoes, and points out that at the center of Earth is hell. The class laughs at him, and Harri is astonished by the fact that they don’t believe in hell, concluding that “they’re in for a nasty surprise!” At afternoon registration, Poppy gives him a letter that says, “Do you like me?” with two tick boxes, yes and no. She asks him to tick a box and give it back to her after the holiday. Harri hopes that the box he ticks is the right one.

Auntie Sonia is honest, generous, and kind, but her life seems to be colored by violence. There is the self-inflicted violence of burning her fingerprints off over and over again, and also implied violence from Julius. While Julius is not explicitly described as perpetuating violence, he has a menacing presence, particularly due to the baseball bat. His advice to Harri seems to suggest that Julius does not consider himself “good” or innocent anymore.



Again, Harri is shown to have mixed feelings about X-Fire and the Dell Farm Crew. Earlier Harri claimed to “hate” them, and now he denies that he wants cornrows just because X-Fire has them. However, it seems that Harri is not being fully honest and is actually just embarrassed about being called out by Lydia.



In quick succession, Harri has declared that both Mario and Jordan are dey touch. This suggests that calling people dey touch is one way in which Harri deals with new, unfamiliar people, situations, and behaviors. Note that Harri is not alone in this habit; calling people dey touch is arguably just another version of calling them “gay,” “lame,” “pussy boy,” or “never-normal.”



This passage illustrates that Harri feels pressure to seem tough in front of kids like Jordan (and thus presumably also the Dell Farm Crew). Jordan is able to pressure Harri into smashing beer bottles, and just Jordan’s presence encourages Harri to punch Lydia. Mamma is clearly right to say that Jordan is a bad influence on her son.



Harri’s life has become increasingly fraught over the course of the novel, with his otherwise happy, normal life being tainted by bullying, violence, peer pressure, dishonesty, and the death of the boy. Poppy is a contrast to all of this: she is innocent and kind and brings out Harri’s natural cheerfulness and innocence.



MAY

There is a carnival in Harri's neighborhood, and everyone dances, "even the white people and the old people." There are men on stilts, which Harri finds hilarious. Terry Takeaway steals a jar of hot dogs for his dog, Asbo, from the raffle stand, and no one stops him. Harri wins a pair of binoculars in the raffle and is thrilled. He looks at a **pigeon** through them, following the pigeon's flight until he feels dizzy. The Dell Farm Crew are there but don't acknowledge Harri. Killa and Miquita are dating now, and Harri hopes they continue so Miquita will leave him alone. Lydia keeps her parrot costume on for the whole day.

Back in Ghana, Agnes has learned how to say the names of everyone in the family. Harri can't wait until she can talk properly, so he can tell her a story about a man with a wooden leg. He wants to tell her that if someone has a missing leg in their mortal life, they will get one in **heaven**. Church is cancelled that day because someone smashed the windows and wrote DFC all over the walls. Mr. Frimpong is crying; Harri pretends not to know what DFC means. Harri suggests that they go to a different church, such as the one where the dead boy's funeral took place. Mamma tells him that this is "the wrong kind of church." Mr. Frimpong grumbles about Catholics wanting to steal the land again, and Harri is confused. He doesn't understand how some churches can be the wrong ones.

Harri thinks that if he joined the Dell Farm Crew, he could teach them about God, but Lydia tells him to stay away from them. They argue about the clothes Lydia bleached. Harri insists that he saw blood on them; Lydia eventually admits that this was true but tells him it was Miquita's blood—"girl's blood." Harri feels bad that Lydia's crying, but he also thinks that she needs to learn a lesson. Harri tells her she looks stupid in her parrot costume, and Lydia tells him to "f— off." Harri is shocked but turns his attention to luring his **pigeon** back with candy. He worries that the pigeon is never going to come back.

Harri tries the "dirty finger trick" on Manik, and Manik responds by insulting the marker drawings that Harri has done on his running shoes, which makes everyone laugh. Harri tried to make the shoes look like Adidas and maintains that they look good from a distance. He angrily thinks that once he's in the Dell Farm Crew, no one will laugh at him anymore.

At the carnival, the problems plaguing Harri's community seem to momentarily fade away, as shown by the fact that everyone dances together, nobody stops Terry Takeaway stealing, and the Dell Farm Crew leave Harri alone. However, this momentary peace and harmony creates a feeling of tension, as it seems bound not to last forever.



The fact that the Dell Farm Crew attack Harri's church highlights how senseless and brutal their behavior is. There is no reason for them to attack the church apart from wanting to cause chaos. This is particularly true given that—as Harri's conversation with Mamma indicates—Harri's church is not a mainstream church, but one that is attended by other Ghanaian immigrants. The Dell Farm Crew have thus chosen a particularly vulnerable population to target with their violence.



In this passage, the reader is once again reminded of how innocent Harri is, to the point of naïve cluelessness. At first Lydia attempts to save Harri from his own cluelessness by warning him not to try to convert the Dell Farm Crew to Christianity. However, she then chooses to utilize Harri's innocence by telling him that the blood was "girl's blood" (implying menstrual blood), presumably hoping that this will make him stop asking questions.



Having shown that immigrants like Harri might be especially vulnerable to joining gangs, the novel now shows a connection between poverty and gang membership. Harri dreams of being part of the Dell Farm Crew in order to reverse the humiliation he feels over his running shoes.



Harri observes that there are security cameras everywhere in London. He, X-Fire, Dizzy, and Killa are trying to rob someone; the other boys are going to bump into the target and Harri will escape with “the prize.” Harri reassures himself that if he just pretends he’s playing suicide bomber, he won’t be afraid. Harri sees his **pigeon** by the newsstand but can’t talk to it because he needs to concentrate on watching for the signal from the others. Harri is horrified to see that X-Fire has chosen Mr. Frimpong as the target. Mr. Frimpong is “only skinny” and the oldest member of Harri’s church congregation. Harri runs as fast as he can, trying not to look where he’s going.

Harri turns around and sees Mr. Frimpong lying on the floor with his legs bent at a strange angle. His shopping has rolled out all over the floor, and the boys are now stamping on it. Mr. Frimpong looks terrified. X-Fire approaches him and demands his wallet. Harri is horrified, and runs away as fast as he can, pretending he can’t hear X-Fire calling after him. The narrative switches back to the **pigeon**’s perspective. The pigeon says that it has been trying to get Harri’s attention and help him, but at a certain point there’s nothing more it can do. The pigeon tells Harri that he can always find home if he is a good person and encourages him to be as “big as you want to be.”

Daniel Bevan uses an inhaler, and Harri thinks he might die soon. Daniel promises to leave Harri his books if he dies first. Harri recalls a memory of Papa letting him drive the pickup truck back in Ghana. In London, Harri throws his coat down a drainpipe so the police won’t know he was involved in the robbery of Mr. Frimpong. He thinks that the devil is “too strong” in London, and that in Ghana he was rarely tempted to do bad things.

Altaf knows all the superheroes and draws pictures of them. He has even invented his own superhero called Snake Man, who can transform into a snake and poison his enemies. Harri is impressed and compliments him. People say that Altaf is gay because he is quiet and has feminine lips, but Harri pretends that Altaf’s lips are his superpower. Harri can fart in a way that makes it sound as if he has a woodpecker in his pants, although he clarifies that this isn’t a superpower, “just a skill.”

In this moment, Mr. Frimpong represents all the parts of Harri’s life that are the opposite of the Dell Farm Crew: Ghana, his family, and his religion. These sides of Harri have so far led him to resist joining the Dell Farm Crew. Regardless of whether X-Fire deliberately chooses Mr. Frimpong or not, this decision forces Harri to choose between two very different paths lying before him.



The pigeon is still a somewhat mysterious figure in the novel; it is not yet totally clear what the bird represents. Here, the pigeon acts as a kind of guardian angel to Harri. The pigeon suggests that home is less a fixed location than a state of existence that Harri can access if he is a good person and true to himself. The more he betrays his own heart, the further Harri will drift away from home.



Harri’s comment about the devil being too strong in London might refer to the greater rate of violent crime that Harri perceives in London. On the other hand, it might also indicate that Harri is more likely to succumb to the temptation of sin in London, as he is a newcomer, vulnerable to prejudice and not yet strongly rooted in a community.



Harri’s kindness toward Altaf reminds us of his gentle, selfless side. Whereas other kids at Harri’s school immediately prey on people’s vulnerabilities in order to bully them, Harri prefers to see these vulnerabilities as strengths.



At school, X-Fire makes the gun sign at Harri, and Dizzy says that the Dell Farm Crew “ain’t gonna forget” that Harri left them during the robbery of Mr. Frimpong. X-Fire warns Harri to stay quiet about it. Later, Harri sees Asbo biting Terry Takeaway. Harri finds it funny at first, but then he and Dean help Terry by putting a branch in Asbo’s mouth. After, they try to train Asbo to recognize the smell of a killer. Harri advises Terry that if Asbo finds a suspect, Terry should tie them up with Asbo’s lead and call the police. Suddenly X-Fire, Dizzy, and Killa walk down the road, which Harri sees as a perfect opportunity to test out the plan.

Asbo sniffs Killa, and Killa pulls a screwdriver from his pants, demanding that Terry get Asbo away from him. Harri feels sure that Asbo has identified that Killa is a sinner, though he can’t tell if this means Killa murdered the dead boy or if Asbo is just picking up on all the other things that he’s done wrong. After X-Fire and the boys leave, Terry offers a kettle to Dean and Harri for six pounds. They both say no but thank him for offering. Harri plans to split the reward with Asbo if they catch the killer.

Harri explains that people who don’t believe in God are “lost” and “empty inside.” Mr. Frimpong doesn’t sing during church that week. He laments that no one stopped and tried to help him. Mamma tells Mr. Frimpong that Harri’s coat was stolen, and Mr. Frimpong speculates that it was probably the same people who robbed him. Harri tries to pray, but it ends up being filled with swearwords. He thinks that his superpower of choice would be invisibility. That was how Mr. Frimpong didn’t notice that it was Harri who knocked him over.

Jordan’s mom has a tattoo, which Harri thinks means she’s a tutufo. He thinks only men should have tattoos. While playing football, Harri and Jordan see Fag Ash Lil, who got her nickname because she picks up used cigarettes from the ground. Harri thinks she must be “at least two hundred years” old. He is afraid of her because there are rumors that she has killed children. As Fag Ash Lil is gets into the lift, Jordan calls her a “stupid old bastard,” and Harri realizes that she thinks Harri was the one who said it. When Harri worries that she will kill them, Jordan replies that he will shank her if she tries. Jordan shows Harri his knife and encourages Harri to get one too. When Harri replies that he doesn’t need one, Jordan tells him everyone does.

Harri may have upset the Dell Farm Crew, but he still has other allies around his neighborhood, such as Terry Takeaway and Dean. However, given the disproportionate level of power and violence that the Dell Farm Crew exert within the community, it seems unlikely that Harri will be able to stand up to them for long and remain unharmed.



Terry Takeaway proves that not all criminals are evil. Although Terry steals, he is also kind and friendly to Harri and Dean when few other people are. Furthermore, his stealing is not motivated by selfishness or cruelty, but—considering how little money he asks for the kettle—seemingly by necessity.



Harri’s claim about people who don’t believe in God seems to be a form of projection. At this point in the novel, Harri is plagued by guilt and internal turmoil, which affects his relationship to his faith—as shown by the prayer that’s accidentally filled with swearwords.



This passage illustrates a key difference between Harri and Jordan. Jordan recklessly provokes other people without fear of the consequences, on the basis that he can stab anyone who dares to reproach him. Harri, meanwhile, prefers not to bother anyone who hasn’t harmed him first and insists that he doesn’t “need” a knife. Of course, Harri’s statement raises the question of whether anyone actually needs a knife or simply whether the idea that people need one creates a meaningless, unstoppable cycle of violence.



Harri says that a war has started, but that he hasn't seen it. He lists the wars that are "going on all the time," including "Kids vs. Teachers," "Northwell Manor High vs. Leabridge High," and "Arsenal vs. Chelsea." While Mamma is in the shower, Harri takes her tomato knife from the kitchen and pretends to use it. He hides it inside his trousers and pretends that there is a war going on, and that God has "forgotten" him. He eventually decides that if a war really does happen, he will just run away, which will be possible because he is so fast.

A boy at school calls Poppy "four-eyes," and Harri defends her. Harri shows Poppy his binoculars but doesn't tell her what they're for, as that's a secret between him and Dean. Poppy became Harri's girlfriend after he ticked the box to say he liked her. Harri and Dean have collected five **fingerprints** so far, including those of innocent people, so that they can compare them to the suspects'. Harri's bedroom is now their "headquarters," and only people with the password—"pigeon"—are allowed in. Harri decides to freeze off his fingerprints in the freezer but worries that he'll get frostbite. After he is done, his fingers go numb, which he thinks means that he no longer has fingerprints. Lydia calls him a "complete retard." He is glad when the numbness fades and feels bad for Auntie Sonia that her fingertips are numb forever.

Miquita is straightening Lydia's hair. After one side of Lydia's head is done, they take a break and drink apple juice, pretending it's champagne. Once Lydia's hair is almost done, Harri concludes that it looks bo-styles. Suddenly Miquita turns angry and asks Lydia if she's "with us," adding: "you're either with us or against us, innit." Miquita taunts Lydia with the straightener, bringing it close to her skin and taking it away. Eventually Lydia cries out that she doesn't know anything, and that she's with them. Miquita has already burned a small red mark into her cheek.

Harri takes Miquita and Chanelle's **fingerprints** from their glasses of juice. He doesn't take Lydia's because she's not a suspect. After Miquita and Chanelle leave, Lydia cuts up her Dance Club costume with scissors. She makes Harri swear not to tell anyone about the clothes at the laundromat, even though she also maintains it was nothing. Harri gets new running shoes called Diadoras from the "cancer shop." He pretends that the person who owned them before was "the greatest at football" and that he will pass on his skills through the shoes. The other kids say that things from the cancer shop have cancer, but Harri knows that's not true.

Once again, Harri processes conflict and violence by turning it into a kind of game. This is shown in his list of "wars"—many of which are not actually violent conflicts but just silly rivalries or sports rivalries. Harry's sense of fantasy and reality are becoming increasingly blurred, putting him in danger of confusing real, dangerous conflict with a mere fantasy.



Harri proclaims to have a clear idea of the distinction between innocence and guilt. For example, he explains that he has taken fingerprints from innocent people—yet how does he know they are innocent in advance of completing the investigation? Harri's decision to freeze off his own fingerprints suggests that the distinction between guilt and innocence is not as simple as he presumes. While Harri obviously did not kill the dead boy, he is also no longer entirely innocent, and now wishes to erase his feelings of guilt through freezing off his fingertips.



Miquita's demand for loyalty indicates that Lydia is indeed somehow involved in the shady activities of the Dell Farm Crew, and perhaps even in the murder of the dead boy. However, it also shows that Lydia's agency has been severely restricted. The fact that she is essentially physically tortured into promising loyalty shows that Lydia has had little choice in the matter.



Harri may have upgraded his running shoes, but he now has to face an additional level of prejudice directed at them. The "cancer shop" refers to a shop selling second-hand clothes for cancer charities. The kids' assumption that the items in it have cancer is arguably less a sincere belief than it is yet another manifestation of prejudice against poverty. Most people in Harri's community are also poor, yet they harshly judge those who are perceived to be poor regardless.



Poppy loves Harri's Diadoras. The two of them hold hands sometimes, but the rest of the time just act "normal." Poppy shows Harri how to hold hands so their fingers are interlaced. She lets him try on her glasses, and he says he wishes he had to wear glasses, not her. He wants to tell her that she is "the most beautiful" and "my yellow," but there are too many other people around.

Harri describes the invisible lines marking the different gang territories in his area. It is important to stay within the right lines in order to be safe. He adds that the church is "home for everybody," and no one can be harmed in there. Home is also safe for everyone, as long as the front door is locked. Harri sees Dizzy, who calls him a "pussy boy" and says he's going to kill him. Harri runs but stops to tease Dizzy, who is out of breath from trying to catch him. Harri rejoices that he's won, but then sees X-Fire, who says: "I'll f—ing kill you!". Harri keeps running and jumps on the chair car lady's chair car. The lady is furious and makes Harri get off. X-Fire and Dizzy crack up laughing, and Harri once again laments that "in England they can never tell if it's a trick or serious."

JUNE

Harri and Dean are on a "stake-out" at the bottom of the stairs in Harri's tower. They vow to stay there watching all day and night and have brought snacks. Harri asks if Jesus is a suspect. Jesus earned the nickname because he has long hair and a beard; he is always rolling around the flats on his rollerblades. Dean confirms that Jesus isn't a suspect because rollerblades are "too conspicuous" for a killer. Harri finds it "relaxing" and "lovely" to be on the stake out, looking at everything through his binoculars. Dean chastises him for getting distracted by looking at **pigeons**. They have a list of "signs of guilt," which Dean has devised from watching TV, and conclude that three signs of guilt is necessary in order to be a major suspect.

Dean suggests that Terry Takeaway could be a suspect, but Harri objects, stating that Terry is his friend. At that moment, Terry sees Harri and shouts to him. Dean curses that their cover is now blown, and Harri decides to wear a disguise next time. Dean tells Harri they need to start collecting DNA through blood, saliva, poop, and even boogers. Harri asks what DNA is, and Dean explains. Harri concludes that DNA is the "greatest invention," and wishes that the killer's DNA could have been altered in order to make him not kill.

Again, Poppy brings innocent joy into Harri's life, and he enjoys being in the role of her boyfriend. On the other hand, there is still part of him that resists being in a relationship, as shown by the fact that he contrasts holding hands with acting "normal."



Harri complains that in England it is never clear whether "it's a trick or serious," but this is also true of his own behavior. Harri plays a game called "suicide bomber," pretends to be a detective, pretends to be in a war, and turns Dizzy chasing him into a game. In each of these cases, Harri turns something serious and violent into a joke, a game, or a fantasy. On the other hand, Harri never does the reverse, and turns something that initially appears to be "a trick" into something genuinely serious and threatening—this behavior is true of the Dell Farm Crew.



The description of Harri and Dean's stakeout further illustrates the way in which Harri processes the trauma of the boy's death, turning it into something fun and even "relaxing." By pretending to be a detective, Harri gets the chance to sit back and observe his neighbors. Of course, as a recent immigrant, he is already a keen observer of the world around him, learning about the customs and norms of his new country through careful observation. He can now put these observational skills to a different use: finding the killer.



Harri arguably relies too much on his instincts in order to be considered a truly reliable detective. On the other hand, his intrinsic innocence and moral goodness are perhaps rather good guides to assessing the guilt of those around him.



Lydia has not stopped talking about the Samsung Galaxy and has asked Auntie Sonia for one as a birthday present. Harri loves overhearing people talk on their mobile phones; he says that he finds it “relaxing.” Auntie Sonia’s nose is bandaged, and Harri thinks it looks like she was in a war. She explains that she was reaching for a suitcase and it accidentally fell and hit her in the face. When Julius comes back from the bathroom, Auntie Sonia becomes quiet. Agnes has a fever, and Julius offers to send her “special medicine,” but Mamma declines. She calls Julius into the kitchen and Harri can hear her opening her secret drawer, where she keeps her money and chocolate. Just before Auntie Sonia goes, she asks Lydia what color phone she wants.

Connor Green boasts that he’s seen Poppy’s boobs, but Harri insists that he’s lying and jealous because he wants to be Poppy’s boyfriend. Poppy writes “P.M. + H.O.” on her desk, followed by “I.D.S.T.” which she explains means “If Destroyed Still True.” Harri writes it on his desk too. He explains that it’s like being married but better because you’d have to have sex. Connor starts talking about people having sex with animals and children. Dean has told Harri that one of the never-normal girls’ grandpas has sex with her, and that’s why she looks so frightened all the time. Dean explains that the girl’s parents are dead, and that if she told the police, she’d have nowhere to live. Harri feels sorry for her.

Harri accidentally gets in the lift with Fag Ash Lil and vows never to go in it again, claiming that he will use the stairs even though they smell like urine. On the news, a man talks about the dead boy and how much he misses him. Harri and Lydia argue, and after, Harri wonders what **heaven** is really like. When the newscaster says “goodnight,” Harri says it back, even though Lydia teases him. Harri once saw a **pigeon** with one leg and asked how it lost it. He explains that he loves all pigeons no matter how many legs they have. Harri loves being outdoors; sometimes it makes him “squeezed up” to stay inside.

Harri would give his life up if it means Agnes doesn’t die. Grandma Ama assures him that Agnes will be fine. Harri thinks that it isn’t fair that you have to go to **heaven** forever; he thinks that people should be able to come back and forth to visit. Harri has a nightmare about Agnes being lost in the deep sea. Back in Ghana, Papa taught Harri to swim. In his dream, Harri sees the **pigeon** and asks if there really is a heaven. The pigeon replies “there is.” Harri asks if Agnes will be okay, and the pigeon says that she will be. The pigeon tells Harri to go back to sleep.

It is likely quite obvious to the reader that Auntie Sonia is lying, and that her broken nose is from Julius rather than a falling suitcase. Note that while Sonia used to insist on being completely honest with Harri and Lydia and not keeping secrets from them, she has now reversed her position. This is likely because Mamma has to keep paying Julius money, so the children have no choice but to be around him. Both Mamma and Auntie Sonia are left especially vulnerable as female African immigrants to the UK.



Because they are only eleven, Harri and his friends still find sex disgusting and scary, even as some of them are likely also beginning to be intrigued by it as well. Dean’s story about the never-normal girl also shows the somewhat limited ways in which children this age are able to express empathy. While Harri does feel pity for the girl, his only access to her story is through Dean’s rather sensationalist telling. Neither Harri nor Dean think of intervening on the girl’s behalf, despite their status as self-styled detectives.



This passage emphasizes that Harri’s childlike innocence is still powerfully present, despite the efforts of characters like Lydia to make him grow up. Perhaps Lydia’s cruel objection to Harri saying “goodnight” to the newscaster is actually a manifestation of jealousy. Lydia, Miquita, and the Dell Farm Crew may all secretly envy Harri’s joyous, carefree, innocent state, which leads them to want to destroy it.



At a time when Harri’s life has become more tumultuous and terrifying than ever, the pigeon appears as a kind of guardian angel. The pigeon is clearly connected with Harri’s ideas about heaven and home, and particularly the sense that home may not be a physical place on Earth, but rather something inside Harri—a state of being.



Harri thinks that “orgasm” means a mouse’s sneeze. He describes all the toughest boys in Year 7. The uppercut is Dean’s move of choice, but he hasn’t used it yet as he’s saving it for “emergencies” only. At lunchtime, Miquita and Chanelle have a massive fight. Miquita calls Chanelle a “fucking skank” and yells “You ain’t gonna tell shit!”. People surround them in a circle, and everyone cheers for Miquita to win.

Harri becomes convinced that one of the two girls is going to die, but everyone keeps watching and cheering. Dizzy takes pictures on his phone, while Killa looks worried and walks away alone. Dizzy encourages Miquita to throw Chanelle through the window, and Miquita begins dragging her toward it, screaming “You best keep your mouth shut, bitch!”. Harri can barely bring himself to look, and sees Lydia looking terrified. The teachers arrive and break up the circle. Everyone walks away in a daze, saying it was the best fight they’ve ever seen.

Harri and Lydia sneak into the Youth Club to play with the pool tables, checking to see if X-Fire is in there first. Outside, Miquita and Killa sit together on the wall, and Miquita is smoking. Miquita says Lydia is a “good girl” who keeps quiet, unlike Chanelle. Harri sees the marks on Miquita’s hands where Killa has burned her with his lighter, and Harri feels sorry for Killa because he has to burn Miquita in order to impress her.

Killa threatens to break Harri’s binoculars if he doesn’t stop staring at him through them. As Harri walks away, Killa grabs him and smashes the binoculars. Killa runs away, and Harri laments that he’s now “just a civilian again.” Lydia offers to buy him new ones, but he tells her they won’t be the same. Harri makes a note that he has observed four signs of guilt in Killa and suggests making him “Suspect Number One.” He adds that Miquita is Killa’s accomplice, and they should beware of her.

At the market, Nish is taken away by the police. He screams and hangs onto his van while the police pry away his fingers. The watch doctor tells the police to “leave him alone,” but the fruit man shouts: “About f—cking time! Send him home!”. Nish’s wife falls on the floor and her shoe comes off, so Harri picks it up for her. Nish and his wife are locked in the van and taken away.

Miquita and Chanelle’s fight demonstrates that violent conflict is not committed solely by boys and men. At the same time, it is clear that there is an added sense of spectacle to the fight between the two girls, suggesting that there may be an extent to which the girls are performing for others by fighting.



When Miquita yells at Chanelle that she better keep her mouth shut, Lydia is suddenly implicated in the fight, as Miquita has said the same thing to her. Dizzy’s shouts of encouragement further indicate that Miquita is fighting Chanelle in order to win the attention and approval of the Dell Farm Crew.



Harri’s feelings of sympathy with Killa are somewhat surprising. Perhaps he feels sympathy for Killa rather than Miquita because Harri has a hard time identifying with girls (and especially Miquita). On the other hand, Harri’s sympathy also highlights the fact that Killa’s cruelty toward Miquita likely emerges from Killa’s own pain and insecurity.



All the clues provided in the book so far indicate that Killa is the murderer. Yet could this be the result of bias on Harri’s part? After all, he concludes that Killa is “Suspect Number One” only after Killa personally antagonizes him, smashing his beloved binoculars. Once again, Harri’s detective skills may be limited by his own biases.



This passage depicts the issues surrounding migration and deportation that have become increasingly fraught in London in recent years. The different reactions of people watching in the market highlight the stark divide in opinion among British people on the issue of migration.



Nish is from Pakistan, and Dean's mamma comments that she didn't know they were "illegal." Everyone agrees that Nish's meat is better than what you get at the butcher. Harri hopes that Pakistan is nice and thinks about all the things he would miss if he were sent away. Lydia explains that Nish didn't have a visa. Harri points out that Julius sells visas, but Lydia responds that they're fake and that Julius is "a crook." Worried, Harri asks if their visa works, and Lydia assures him that it does.

This passage reveals that Lydia has a greater understanding of the world than Harri. Whereas Harri doesn't know what a visa is or realize that Julius is a "crook," Lydia has been able to figure these things out. On the other hand, her assurance that their visas work seems tenuous, considering that Mamma appears to have bought them from Julius.



Harri tries to collect Jordan's spit, but Jordan won't let him. Jordan's favorite gun is a Glock, which he says is what "the toughest gangsters use." He vows to buy one as soon as he has enough money. Once, Jordan had to bury a gun for the Dell Farm Crew and boasts that he even got to pull the trigger. The boys usually bury guns in the gardens of old people who won't notice and do so at night. Harri finds the idea of planting a gun crazy and imagines a tree of baby guns growing from the soil. A bus comes, and Harri and Jordan throw stones at it. The driver sees them and the boys run away.

Harri's friendship with Jordan is a clear example of peer pressure. Without the influence of Jordan and other kids like him, it seems unlikely that Harri would ever fantasize about gun ownership. His mind is still too innocent, as shown by the fact that his fantasy soon drifts to an image of a tree of baby guns. Yet because Jordan thinks guns are cool, Harri decides that he does as well.



Mamma is waiting on the other side of the tunnel. She calls Harri a "stupid boy" and tells Jordan to stay away from him. She calls Jordan "a waste of time." Jordan calls Harri a "pussy boy," and Harri tells him to "f— off," which leads Mamma to threaten to "beat the black off you." Harri feels miserable. He is sure that he's ruined everything, and that God is going to kill Agnes in punishment.

Although Harri may at times act recklessly, this passage emphasizes that in reality, he feels a heavy burden of responsibility. He is convinced that if he angers God, Agnes will die as punishment. Trapped between two worlds, Harri feels isolated and panicked.



Harri recalls what it was like in Ghana when there was a blackout. He would go around the neighborhood with Papa distributing paraffin, and eventually it would turn into a party. Harri was even given one sip of beer for helping. Mamma and Grandma Ama made cowpea stew for everyone, and music played. Harri wanted the night to last forever. Back in the present, Harri sneaks out after Mamma and Lydia are asleep and puts his lucky alligator tooth in the drainpipe as an offering to God. He is sure that God will fix everything now.

It is unsurprising that at his darkest moment, Harri turns to his memories of Ghana in order to re-center himself. Thinking about his life in Ghana brings Harri comfort and helps remind him of his values. This gives him the courage to sacrifice the alligator tooth—which was given to him by Papa—in order to make everything better.



Harri walks past the church with Dean and Connor when X-Fire and Dizzy stop them. Harri keeps both feet inside the church grounds because he thinks that means the boys can't hurt him, but they reply that they don't believe in "fairy stories." Dizzy stamps on the church flowers, and Harri tells him to let Connor and Dean go because "it's nothing to do with them." Dizzy punches Harri in the arm, and Harri screams even though it doesn't hurt because he thinks this will make Dizzy leave the others alone. X-Fire tells Dizzy that Harri is "not worth it," and the boys walk away. Harri concludes that it was just a "trick" all along.

Harri now faces his problems with a newfound sense of courage and selflessness, as shown by his willingness to take Dizzy's beating if he lets Dean and Connor go. At the same time, Harri faces a difficult battle in confronting the Dell Farm Crew, particularly because they do not behave with any sense of moral integrity themselves.



Dean admits that four guilty signs is incriminating but not enough to prove that Killa is the murderer. They need DNA, and Dean points out that they now have a chance, as Killa and the rest of the Dell Farm Crew are nearby in the cafeteria. Harri reluctantly agrees to distract Killa while Dean collects the DNA sample with sellotape. Harri walks up to Killa and pushes him, then calls him a “batty boy.” Dizzy and Clipz go after Harri, and at the same time, Dean places the sellotape over the spot on the cafeteria window where Killa’s hands had been. Killa tries to wipe his **fingerprints** away, and the whole Dell Farm Crew sprint after Harri.

Harri runs into Mr. Tomlin’s class, where he knows he’s safe. Later, Dean and Harri review the sellotape, but are disappointed to find that the fingerprints are blurry because Dean gathered them too quickly. Harri puts the sellotape in a folder and writes Killa’s name on it. He admits that it feels scary in a good way, as if he has control over Killa.

Over the phone, Grandma Ama tells the family that Agnes is feeling better, and Mamma and Lydia cry with joy. The day before Lydia’s birthday, Auntie Sonia gives her a Samsung Galaxy, and Lydia is so happy she cries again. After getting it, Lydia starts taking pictures of everything. Harri gets a remote-control car even though it’s not his birthday. Julius is fixing his baseball bat, which he calls “the persuader.” Harri asks if he can knock someone’s head right off with it, and Julius says no, but it can do quite a lot of damage. Mamma doesn’t say anything but scrubs the dishes like she is “trying to scrub the sin off them.”

Harri sees a Year 10 girl in a headscarf praying and finds it “relaxing” to watch her. After she finishes, Harri walks away and accidentally bumps into Killa, who points a craft knife at Harri and demands to have his **fingerprints** back. Killa tells Harri not to mess with him and says, “You can’t prove nothing anyway.”

On Lydia’s birthday, it is warm, and people are blasting music out their windows. She gets chocolate cake and a package from Ghana, which contains CDs from Abena, earrings from Grandma Ama, a picture of Agnes’ hand, and a dancer that Papa carved for her from wood. Lydia starts crying, and Mamma observes that “she’s missing her Papa.” Harri tries to cheer her up, and Lydia smiles a small smile, then laughs.

Dean and Harri might be only eleven and using rather crude detective materials, but this is still enough to put Killa on edge. Indeed, his paranoia about them gathering his fingerprints is arguably one of the most incriminating signs of behavior Killa has displayed so far. Yet it remains unclear if this is because he is the murderer, or because he is worrying about being caught for some other crime.



Harri has spent most of the novel feeling powerless in the face of the Dell Farm Crew. Regardless of whether it amounts to anything, his detective work allows him to gain a sense of power and control over the older boys.



Due to the burden of responsibility that Mamma bears and her vulnerability as a recent immigrant and a woman, she does not feel able to retaliate against Julius or defend her sister. Instead, Mamma is forced to suffer in silence and maintain a strong, stoic image in front of her children, keeping her true feelings secret.



Although Harri doesn’t know the Year 10 girl and although she practices a different religion, he finds comfort to see someone else immersed in their own faith and values.



Due to the separation of the family, even happy occasions like birthdays are tainted by sadness. This passage also shows how the separation affects Lydia and Harri differently due to their different ages. Due to her more sophisticated grasp of the situation, Lydia finds it harder to deal with.



Harri asks Lydia if she's ready for her surprise. At first, she is suspicious that it is a trick, but then agrees to go with him. Harri leads her to some wet cement he found earlier in the day and explains that if they jump in it, their footprints will be there forever. Lydia is uncertain, but after Harri demonstrates, she leaves her footprints too. They write their names below their footprints, and Lydia beams "from ear to ear." Harri is thrilled that now the whole world will know they were there, and in his head asks the **pigeon** to guard the cement until it dries. The narrative switches to the pigeon's perspective, and it agrees.

Harri loves surprises, like the cement or when people have hidden talents. While Harri and Dean play football, Dean notices something wrapped up on the ground. Nervously, Dean unwraps it, and they see it's a wallet. It is sticky with dark stains and has no money inside. However, it does contain a photograph of the dead boy wearing his Chelsea shirt next to a white girl. They are both smiling, and Harri reflects that he didn't know the dead boy had a girlfriend. The girl is "nearly as pretty as Poppy," and Harri suddenly feels overwhelmed by sadness. Harri and Dean speculate that the stickiness on the wallet could be blood or oil.

Harri and Dean go back to Harri's room and apply the sellotape the stains. Harri suggests that they taste it to check if its real blood, but Dean replies that it might have AIDS, and that it is creeping him out. Later, Terry Takeaway gives Harri Asbo's leash to hold and teaches him how to make Asbo walk next to him. Harri instructs Asbo to sniff out the killer, and Terry shows off all the tricks Asbo can do. Harri's favorite is when Asbo shakes hands with his paw. He thinks it is "the funniest thing I've ever seen."

JULY

Harri describes what he has learned about the different parts of the body and their functions in science class. Connor Green makes lewd jokes, but Mr. Tomlin's jokes are funnier. Eventually, Mr. Tomlin sends Connor Green out of the classroom. After school, Harri brings his remote-control car to Jordan's flat and Jordan begs to have a go. Harri enjoys watching him get increasingly desperate, before abruptly telling him that he has to go inside for dinner and returning to his own flat. Harri concludes: "Now I'm the winner forever."

As a symbol, footprints are clearly related to fingerprints, as both represent identity and legacy. Yet where fingerprints are associated with guilt and criminality in the novel, this passage represents footprints in a positive, happy light. By leaving their footprints in the cement, Harri and Lydia feel a sense of belonging in their new home. They become—literally—part of the city.



As the novel nears its end, the parallels between Harri and the dead boy eerily increase. Although it is not clear whether the blond girl in the picture was actually the dead boy's girlfriend, Harri projects his own circumstances onto the dead boy and assumes that, like him and Poppy, the dead boy and the girl were dating.



Throughout the novel, Terry Takeaway and Asbo provide moments of lighthearted comic relief. However, as the narrative progresses and the issues Harri faces become more urgent and serious, these moments of levity become increasingly rare.



This is one of the passages in which Harri seems most like a child. His usual capacity for kindness and empathy is diminished by his desire to show off and "win" against Jordan. Harri knows that it will probably make Jordan frustrated and jealous to see his car and not be able to play with it, and this is exactly the reaction Harri seeks.



Miquita puts on cherry lipstick, preparing to teach Harri how to kiss. Harri reasons that if he is a good kisser, then Poppy will never break up with him. Lydia laughs as Harri makes himself still, preparing to be kissed. Harri is surprised by how soft it is, but then exclaims in horror when Miquita puts her tongue in. Lydia objects that Harri's only in Year 7 so doesn't need to know about tongues, but Miquita responds by asking if she wants her brother to become a batty boy. Harri finds Miquita's tongue "disgusting." Miquita grabs Harri's hand and puts it down her pants, forcing his fingers to touch her vagina. Harri feels nauseous, and Lydia shouts for her to stop. Eventually Harri pushes her off.

Harri calls Miquita a "stupid bitch" and Lydia tells her to leave him alone. When Miquita responds that Lydia is "f—cking lame," Lydia says, "At least my boyfriend's not a murderer." Everyone goes quiet. Eventually Lydia tells Miquita that she shouldn't let Killa burn her hands with the lighter, calling her "weak." Miquita boasts that she can't be weak after how she beat Chanelle. Miquita leaves, and Harri locks the door behind her. He gets a fresh pack of Oreos from Mamma's secret drawer and lets Lydia have the first one.

The narrative switches back to the perspective of the **pigeon**, who describes being attacked by magpies and worrying that it is "mortal after all." It wonders, "If I'm not here who looks after the boy?" Harri then describes chasing the magpies away and asking if the pigeon is alright. The pigeon calls Harri a "good boy," and thanks him for rescuing it.

Regretful about what happened with Miquita, Harri gives Poppy a jelly ring. The couple walks past Clipz, who asks if Harri has "shagged" Poppy yet, but Harri ignores him. On Sports Day, Harri wins first place in his race. He is now officially "the fastest in Year 7." Everyone shakes his hand, and he feels like "the king." He feels like he has a magical spell that means no one can touch him, he and wishes "every day was just like this."

Auntie Sonia is going on a boat to hide from Julius. She apologizes to Mamma for telling her about Julius, but Mamma says she has no regrets because otherwise she would have never made it to England. She did it for Harri and Lydia, and as long as she pays off her debt, everything will be fine. Auntie Sonia is letting her **fingerprints** grow back, and Mamma is happy. Mamma tells her, "You can't keep running forever." Auntie Sonia prays that she doesn't end up in a jail in Libya again. Her leg is in a cast, and Harri assumes that Julius did it with his baseball bat, "the Persuader." Harri draws a **pigeon** on the cast for "good luck."

This is one of the most disturbing passages in the novel, as it depicts Harri being sexually assaulted by Miquita. While he does consent to her teaching him how to kiss, Harri protests when she starts to use tongues, and he tries to escape as she forces him to touch her vagina. Miquita's cruel recklessness is facilitated by the fact that the sexual assault of boys by girls is something rarely discussed. As a boy, Harri is not given the opportunity to refuse sex.



Lydia and Miquita's argument demonstrates that girls also face pressure to seem tough in front of each other. Lydia calling Miquita "weak" seems to be one of the worst insults she can think of, and it becomes clear that Miquita's fight with Chanelle was indeed a kind of performance intended to demonstrate that she—like the boys—is tough and intimidating.



The pigeon is not just Harri's guardian angel; their relationship is, in fact, reciprocal, with both of them looking out for one another. This reciprocity indicates that it is possible to be both vulnerable and strong at the same time, giving and receiving help.



Once again, Harri struggles to retain his carefree innocence in the face of pressures to grow up and display (what is thought to be) proper "manly" behavior. Harri does not fantasize about having sex with Poppy and bragging about it to others. Instead, he is focused on more age-appropriate achievements, such as winning the Sports Day race.



Harri's drawing of the pigeon on Auntie Sonia's cast is symbolically significant. Pigeons have the natural freedom to fly around, and—like many other birds—some migrate. In this way, there is a parallel between the pigeon's freedom and Sonia's desire to move around without settling down. Furthermore, just as pigeons are treated poorly by humans, Sonia has been beaten by Julius and risks confinement in a Libyan jail.



Someone has carved the word “DEAD” into the door of Harri’s flat. Harri tells Mamma it was probably a junkie but secretly thinks it was Jordan doing it as a joke. At school, Altaf and Harri discuss superheroes again. Altaf confesses that his father died in a war. Harri likes the idea of being born “normal” and then gaining a superpower, but he swears that if he were a superhero, he wouldn’t wear a costume because they “look gay.”

Harri is extremely excited for the summer holiday. He is going to go to the zoo, and by that time, Papa, Agnes, and Grandma Ama will be in London. In the summer, Harri also wants to go on a long bike ride around the city with Dean. Harri secretly borrows Lydia’s phone to try to catch the dead boy’s spirit, which Harri thinks will still be lingering around the places that the boy loved. Harri holds the picture of the dead boy and says a prayer to try to summon the spirit. Harri remembers how good the dead boy was at basketball, and how he would never let X-Fire and Killa push him around. The dead boy “wasn’t scared of anything.” Harri remembers a fight between the dead boy, X-Fire, and Killa, in which the dead boy spat water all over Killa’s back. After that, Harri knew the boy was going to be killed.

X-Fire and Dizzy approach Dean and Harri and ask what they are doing. Killa and Miquita are there too. Harri drops Lydia’s phone to hide it. Dizzy tells them they are trespassing and makes them pay a “tax.” Dean only has sixty-three pence, so Dizzy takes Dean’s running shoes as well. Dizzy reaches into Harri’s pocket and finds the wallet with the dead boy’s picture in it. Realizing there is no money inside, Dizzy throws the wallet on the floor, and as he does, the picture falls out. As Killa picks up the picture, Miquita tries to tell him that it’s not a big deal, but Killa pushes her against the fence. X-Fire advises Killa to just “get rid of it.” Killa runs away, looking like he is about to cry. X-Fire burns the picture with a lighter.

Dizzy and X-Fire corner Harri and Dean. X-Fire reaches into his pants, and Harri knows he is retrieving his “war knife.” Harri looks up and sees the **pigeon** and begs it to save them. Suddenly, Harri hears Lydia shout, “Get away from him! I called the police!” Lydia has been filming the whole interaction on her phone, which she must have picked up when Harri dropped it. Dizzy starts to chase Lydia, but she, Harri, and Dean manage to escape into the library. Lydia shows Harri and Dean the video, which shows Killa looking sad and X-Fire burning the picture of the dead boy. Lydia emails the video to Abena to keep it safe.

The kids in Harri’s community often treat war and violence as a joke or game. At the same time, for characters like Altaf, the truth of war is all too real. The fact that Altaf’s father died in a war highlights that the reality of war is actually all around Harri.



Right at the end of the novel, Harri provides details that shed some light on why the dead boy might have been killed. Harri’s memory of the dead boy’s boldness and his fight with X-Fire and Killa points back to Miquita’s statement that the boy was killed for “fronting,” or acting tough and confrontational. In the world of the novel, showing respect to those who are considered be tougher and more powerful than you is a matter of life and death.



Throughout the novel, it is unclear whether Killa’s silence and sadness is a sign of sympathy, regret, or fear of the consequences of someone finding out that he killed the boy—if, of course, he was the murderer. However, the fact that his reaction to the picture is so different from the rest of the Dell Farm Crew suggests that he does bear a unique responsibility for the death of the boy. Is his sadness in this scene the final piece of evidence Dean and Harri need to conclude that he is the murderer?



Throughout the novel, it remains ambiguous whether Harri’s belief that the pigeon is looking out for him is actually true. Perhaps the pigeon does possess some magical power that enables it to send Lydia to rescue Harri. On the other hand, perhaps the pigeon’s consciousness and powers are all part of Harri’s vibrant imagination and are only “real” insofar as he believes them to be.



The **pigeon** says that it wanted to do more to save Harri, but it was “not my place.” The pigeon quotes “the Boss,” who says that humans are just meat wrapped around a star. When the meat dies, you must celebrate “the freeing of the star,” which returns to its “rightful place.”

Connor Green boasts that he knows who killed the dead boy. He claims that he was driving past when he saw the boy being stabbed. He then saw Jermaine Bent running away with a knife. Someone asks why Connor didn’t tell the police, and Connor replies that he didn’t want to get stabbed. Everyone teases Connor for claiming that the car he was driving in was his brother’s BMW, because they know his brother can’t afford one. However, Harri is in shock. Jermaine Bent is Killa’s real name.

In PE, Harri plays a game called rounders, which he hates. Inspired by Altaf’s suggestion, Harri sneaks away through a hole in the fence into a forest behind school. He bites an apple from the apple tree, believing that this will give him superpowers. Even though they are disgusting, Harri eats two of them. Feeling awful, he forces himself to return to the game of rounders and tells his PE teacher that he is feeling ill. He is allowed to sit out the rest of the game.

Someone has set the playground by Harri’s tower block on fire. As the assembled adults grumble about the kids who must have done it, Harri is comforted by the feeling that everyone standing with him is on the “same side.” The firemen arrive, and some of the smaller kids try to help them lift the hose. Once the playground has been hosed down, it looks “dirty and dead.” Harri sees Killa standing by himself. Killa picks up one of the hot woodchips and squeezes it in his hand so that it burns him. Harri observes that Killa “was even loving it.” Killa looks as sad as Harri.

On the last day of school, Lydia, Dean, and Harri walk to school together to stay safe. It’s hot, and everyone is happy. All the Year 11 kids write on each other’s shirts for good luck. For them, school is “finished forever.” Harri can’t wait to participate in the tradition of writing on shirts. Some people write “Good Luck” or “One Love,” some people just write their names, and some write jokes like “See you at the job centre,” or “Don’t pay tax, sell drugs instead.” At the end of the day, everyone runs out of the school, ignoring the rule about running on the stairs. It feels like a “race for the future.”

At this point, the pigeon speaks as if it is working on behalf of God or some other higher being. The implication of this speech is that humans have immortal, celestial souls that outlive their mortal bodies.



This passage contains a dramatic and surprising twist. Up until this point, Connor has always been represented as a liar and a fool, and in this passage, his boast about his brother’s BMW is taken as proof that the tale he is telling is a lie. However, the fact that he identifies Killa as the murderer suggests that he may, for once, be telling the truth—at least about the identity of the murderer.



Harri continues to encounter difficulties in adjusting to English culture, seen in his hatred of rounders, which is a bat-and-ball game played in the UK that is somewhat similar to baseball. In addition, his decision to eat the apples, despite how disgusting he finds them, suggests that he is feeling pressure to become a “hero” no matter the cost.



Again, Killa displays signs of misery, guilt, and regret. Harri’s perception that Killa is “even loving it” while he causes himself pain by burning himself is a misunderstanding. Killa likely wants to hurt himself as a form of punishment, not because he enjoys it. His squeezing of the woodchip connects him to Auntie Sonia, who burns her fingertips on purpose.



Considering what happens to Harri at the end of the novel, the last day of school is shrouded in tragic irony. All the kids in Year 11 are looking excitedly toward the future, even though the fact that they are growing up in a poor, violent community—and seemingly not going on to pursue further education—suggests that their lives might become even more difficult in the years to come.



Poppy and Harri hold hands at the school gate. Harri feels frightened by how beautiful she is. Poppy says she's going to Spain for two weeks but reassures him that she is coming back to school. Harri wants to tell her he loves her, but "it felt too big." Poppy asks him to text her and gives him her number, then kisses him. It feels "lovely," nothing like it did with Miquita. Poppy's mom is waiting, and Poppy gets into the car. She waves through the window, and Harri waves back. The taste of Poppy's lips on his feels like "a superpower."

Harri and Dean have been preparing to tell the police that Killa is the murderer. They plan to tell their mothers first so that the police are more likely to believe them. The two boys speculate over whether the police will torture Killa during his interrogation. Harri runs down the hill, telling himself that if he gets home in seven minutes, Poppy will stay with him, and he will "solve the case." As he runs, he shouts out "Poppy I love you!" He feels like he is running the fastest he's ever ran and shouts out, "Tree I love you!" He runs through the tunnel and yells, creating the "best echo ever." He thinks about the big glass of water he's going to drink when he gets home.

When Harri is almost home, he describes an unnamed boy coming "out of nowhere." The boy had been waiting for Harri, and Harri can tell from the boy's eyes what he is about to do. The boy bumps into Harri and then runs away. Harri can smell his own urine and thinks that he doesn't want to die. He whispers, "Mamma." He can taste metal. The **pigeon** arrives and assures him that Harri will be "going home soon." Harri asks if the pigeon works for God, but the pigeon doesn't reply. Harri tells the pigeon to tell Agnes the story about the fake leg, and the pigeon promises that it will. Harri can see the blood and can't keep his eyes open. He wants to remember Agnes' face, but eventually it fades, because "all babies look the same."

In this passage, Harri once again realizes that the feeling of superpowers does not have to come from actual fantastic abilities. Instead, it can arise in perfectly ordinary moments in daily life, such as winning the Sports Day race or kissing Poppy. Again, Harri is shown to have a wonderful, childlike capacity to find joy in the simple aspects of life.



This passage emphasizes Harri's childlike, carefree joy. As he has mentioned previously in the novel, he feels an overwhelming love for the world around him—not just for Poppy, but even for things like the tunnel and the trees. In the context of a world marred by cruelty, bullying, conflict, and violence, Harri's capacity for love and happiness seems even more remarkable.



The plot of the novel comes full circle, when—at Harri's happiest moment—he is fatally stabbed by an unknown attacker (assumedly Killa or another member of the Dell Farm Crew). Despite being harmless, joyful, and full of love, Harri is still targeted and killed, a fact that highlights the true devastation of the knife crime epidemic. Harri's thoughts about Agnes and the pigeon in his final moments illustrate just how innocent and childlike he is—still a "baby" himself at the moment of his death.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Seresin, Indiana. "Pigeon English." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 May 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Seresin, Indiana. "Pigeon English." LitCharts LLC, May 25, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pigeon-english>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Pigeon English* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Kelman, Stephen. *Pigeon English*. Bloomsbury. 2011.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Kelman, Stephen. *Pigeon English*. London: Bloomsbury. 2011.